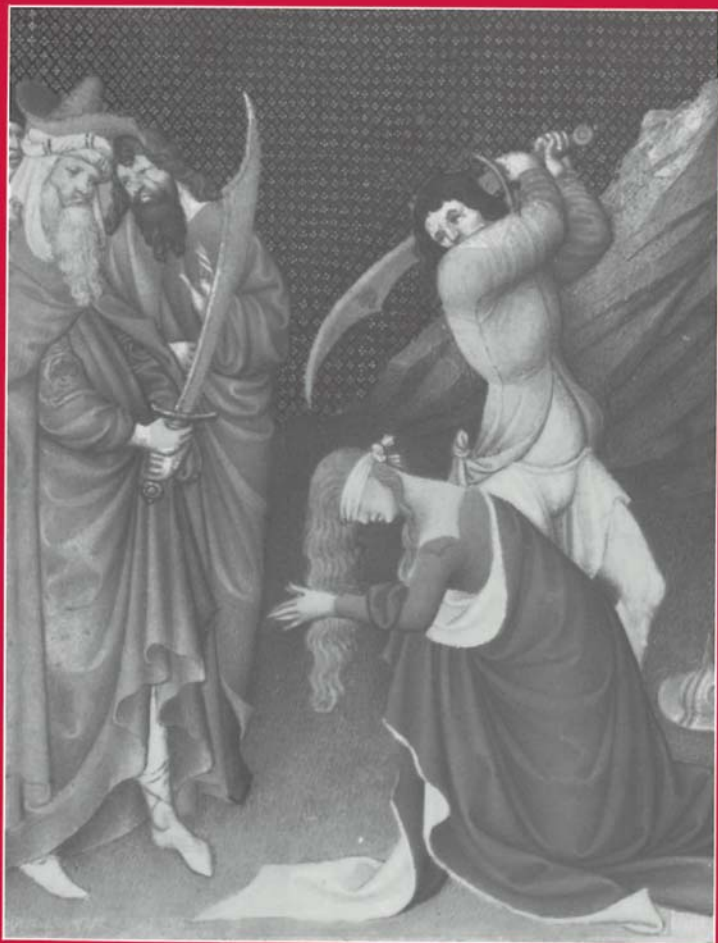


The Lady as Saint

A COLLECTION OF FRENCH HAGIOGRAPHIC ROMANCES
OF THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY



BRIGITTE CAZELLES

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The Lady as Saint

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The Lady as Saint

A Collection of French
Hagiographic Romances
of the Thirteenth Century

Brigitte Cazelles



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I

Commentary

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Introduction

The aim of this work is to provide access to an important literary genre of medieval France: verse hagiography, that is, writings about saints. The oldest extant literary document in French (the ninth-century *Sequence of Saint Eulalia*) is, indeed, a hagiographic poem; the genre also attracted the interest of numerous vernacular authors up to the fifteenth century.¹ The thirteen poems translated in this Anthology are representative examples of Old French hagiography as the genre flourished during the thirteenth century.

The central subject of hagiographic literature is the commemoration of the holy men and women—that is, saints—of the Christian tradition. Devotion to the saints, which was particularly intense during the Middle Ages, inspired the writing of a vast quantity of hagiographic texts in Latin, the language of knowledge and authority, as well as everyday language, that is, the vernacular. These texts took widely different forms according to their linguistic medium, their date and place of composition, and the type of sanctity that they sought to extol. Within the French hagiographic tradition, for example, the exaltation of martyrdom did not play the same role in the ninth-century poem *Sequence of Saint Eulalia* as in the fifteenth century; nor did verse Saints' Lives have the same function as hagiographic accounts composed in prose. Hagiographic literature evolved across the centuries and inspired a variety of responses consistent with the changing nature of society, thus constituting a privileged source of documentation for our understanding of the values and ideals that epitomized medieval culture at a given moment of its history.

Evidence of the diversity that characterizes the genre as it developed during the Middle Ages is provided by the thirteen poems contained in this Anthology. These accounts vary in form and length. A few employ a ten-syllable verse, in imitation of the meter that is the mark of the epic genre; most, however, use the octosyllabic verse in vogue in twelfth-century courtly romance. Our poems also vary in content and exalt different modes of sanctity, ranging from the martyrs of early Christianity, through the hermits of Egypt and Asia Minor, to a contemporary married woman (Elizabeth of Hungary: 1207–1231).

The metric and thematic marks of our textual corpus deserve particular attention, for they help determine its specific significance within the medieval hagiographic tradition, as well as within the history of French literature. An important element in that respect is the verse form common to these thirteen Lives. From the ninth to the late thirteenth century, Old French hagiography was predominantly composed in verse, and so were, at least until the end of the twelfth century, most of the works of imaginative literature in the vernacular. One of the reasons that explains the prevalence of verse in the early period of French literature was the relative lack of literacy of its intended audience.² While literacy in the Middle Ages is a complex issue that encompasses many more variables that can possibly be evoked here, we can cite ignorance of Latin and, in many cases, the inability to read as two primary factors in the emergence and development of vernacular literature in its poetized form. Works such as the first epics and verse Saints' Lives reflected a growing demand on the part of the less educated members of medieval society for literary texts designed to entertain and instruct them. Stories about secular and saintly heroes or heroines composed in Old French verse were transmitted orally in the course of public performances.³ The use of verse facilitated the retention of these texts in the memory of both the speaker and the hearers, through the rhymes and metric patterns that imparted to many of these texts a fixed and formulaic quality.⁴

The verse form employed in our texts thus indicates that they served to edify the illiterate strata of society. Another noteworthy element is their time and place of composition. Linguistic traits suggest that these thirteenth-century poems were composed for the French-speaking public of northern Europe, including the regions of France north of the Loire, as well as Champagne, Flanders, and the Anglo-Norman realm.⁵ Aside from these general facts, however, little is known about the circumstances in which these poems were recited. Since the manuscripts that preserve them are composite manuals lacking thematic coherence, in the main information derives from the texts themselves. The poems sometimes allude to contemporary events that circumscribe their approximate date of composition. In a few cases, the author names himself and presents the reasons that prompted him to write a Saint's Life. Yet most of the texts remained anonymous, since the writing of Saints' Lives was a devotional rather than artistic exercise by means of which the authors sought to better themselves as well as to edify their listeners. Their goal was not to achieve auctorial prestige, but to contribute to the moral welfare of society.

Thus, in contrast to writers of imaginative literary works, whose value was intricately connected to their authors' personal creativity, French hagiographers grounded the value of their narratives in "historical" truth, as confirmed by the ancient Christian tradition of their subject matter. The fact that their stories were translations—or, more precisely, adaptations—of Latin sources served as a guarantee that the saintly heroes and heroines thus commemorated were authentic and deserving of recognition as exemplary models. In many of our poems, the author refers to the Latin "book" on which he bases his narrative as a means of asserting the truth of his story. While these references remain vague, thus increasing the difficulty of identifying the precise Latin text, or texts, from which the French Life actually derives, they nonetheless suggest that their authors had received enough training to be endowed with the ability both to read Latin and to engage in hagiographic activities. In a society like thirteenth-century northern Europe, where women of all social strata, including the nobility, were denied entrance to the universities and, in the main, excluded from institutions of higher learning, reading and writing represented a kind of expertise that they usually did not possess.⁶ Apart from isolated cases (among others, Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim in the tenth century,⁷ the female poets—*trobairitz*—of southern France in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Marie de France in the last decades of the twelfth century, Hadewijch of Brabant in the thirteenth century, and Christine de Pizan in the early fifteenth century⁸), there are few examples of non-religious writing by women in the Middle Ages. The history of female writers chiefly began in the late Middle Ages with the growth of literacy when, for example, women undertook to record their mystical experiences.⁹ We can safely assume, therefore, that our poems were written by men.

Male authorship characterizes not only the thirteenth-century Saints' Lives presented in this Anthology, but, in fact, the entire production of verse hagiography. However, the surviving textual corpus also provides notable, albeit rare, examples of female authorship. In addition to the thirteen women whose Lives are the subject of this book, two other saints were commemorated in poems composed by and for Benedictine women. One is the *Life of Saint Audrey* by Mary of Barking at the Ely abbey, and the second, the *Life of Saint Osyth* by an anonymous nun. Each poem exalts an important figure in the history of seventh-century England in a manner that evokes the narrative conventions of a specific genre, that is, the chronicle. The story of Osyth is part of the illustrious annals of Christian Essex, while that of Audrey, which is loaded with genealogical details, is linked to the

foundation of the Ely abbey.¹⁰ These two texts, which amplify the local rather than universal significance of their saintly heroines, deserve separate study as examples of “historical hagiography.”¹¹

That the male authors of our poems were literate does not necessarily imply that they mastered theology, nor that they belonged to the Church clergy. In the absence of direct evidence, documentation is, here again, scant and derivative. Two of our authors on whom we have relatively more information are Gautier de Coinci (the author of our *Life of Saint Christina*), who was a Benedictine monk best remembered for the works he wrote in honor of the Virgin Mary, and Rutebeuf, a well-known Parisian poet and the author of two of our texts. On the basis of these two cases, it appears that the writing of Old French Saints’ Lives inspired religious clerics as well as lay writers. This variety in terms of authorship also suggests a similar variety in the types of audiences for whom these texts were composed. Devotion for the saints was undoubtedly a phenomenon that pervaded all strata of medieval society, from the monastic community for whom, in all likelihood, Gautier de Coinci wrote his *Christina* to Rutebeuf’s urban audience. Whether religious or lay, however, what all the audiences of hagiographic accounts in verse had in common was that they belonged to an oral culture. Regardless of their station in life, they formed a single, collective entity to the extent that they relied on the spoken word as a means of access to knowledge and wisdom. The basic lessons communicated through the public recitation of saints’ lives insisted on the necessity of serving God, of observing His commands, and of avoiding sin.

Whether written in Latin or in the vernacular, medieval hagiographic literature is, indeed, an essentially didactic enterprise whose purpose is to exalt the saints of the Christian tradition as emblems of a virtuous mode of life. The genre has thus long attracted the attention of experts in religious studies. From the sixteenth century on, attempts were made to assess the authenticity of the saints venerated in the Middle Ages and, consequently, of the documents that commemorated them.¹² Scholars also recognized the value of the hagiographic tradition in providing access to medieval views on piety and spirituality.¹³ Testifying to the complex character of the medieval representation of sanctity, critical studies of the genre now comprise a wide variety of perspectives that explore not only the religious and historical interest of the hagiographic tradition, but also its social and political significance.¹⁴ Examinations focus, for example, on hagiography in its learned as well as popular manifestations, on the uses and abuses of the cult of the saints in medieval society, and on the mystical experience in the writings of male and female holy visionaries.¹⁵

On the whole, these explorations give priority to the Latin hagiographic tradition. Despite a number of informative works, particularly in the form of critical editions of Saints' Lives, hagiographic literature in the vernacular remains comparatively unexploited.¹⁶ One notable exception is the production of Saints' Lives by late medieval authors such as Chaucer and Christine de Pizan, a production that has inspired specific analyses of the function of hagiography within these individual authors' literary discourse.¹⁷ Against the rhetorical significance of hagiography in the highly textualized environment of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century literature, Saints' Lives composed during the previous centuries involved different creative practices and played, therefore, a widely different role. Scholarship in the field shows a general tendency to neglect these early hagiographic texts as documents of little literary merit.¹⁸ Undoubtedly, and in contrast to the artistic practices involved either in the writing of contemporary courtly lyrics and romances, or in hagiographic literature by late medieval authors, verse Saints' Lives such as our thirteenth-century poems are not the product of any distinct auctorial voice. Hagiographic production during the early period of French literature did not serve as a means to achieve artistic renown; the poets' aim was, in principle at least, to edify rather than to entertain their public.

Based on the surviving textual corpus, however, it appears that the authors chose to adapt those accounts in the Latin hagiographic tradition whose story line favored dramatic events and exotic adventures at the expense of religious moralization. Indeed, the prevalence of martyrs and hermits in verse hagiography in general, and in our thirteenth-century poems in particular, is not incidental but an intrinsic aspect of the genre in the Old French tradition. Beneath the didactic surface of these narratives, the dominant component in terms of length and thematic amplification remains the spectacular account of the facts and events that led to the protagonists' sanctification. In the case of the martyrs, favorite scenes include the encounter between the heroine and her pagan tormentor, as well as the series of tortures to which she is submitted; the stories of holy hermits similarly emphasize the theatrical circumstances, such as enclosure in a cell or sojourn in the wilderness, in which their perfection becomes manifest. These narratives, therefore, call attention to the external manifestations of sanctity rather than to its spiritual value. Although the religious fervor that inspired vernacular authors to engage in hagiographic activities was certainly genuine, the significance of their works resides in the process of selection that prompted them to focus on martyrdom and eremitism as two particularly worthy modes of sanctity, as well as in the

inventive way they adapted their sources. Occasional references to the Latin “book” on which they based their story served, first and foremost, to endow their narratives with the same status as that possessed by the official language of knowledge and authority. These Old French Saints’ Lives are, in reality, not faithful translations as much as they are embellishments of the originals. Another evidence of the fictional character of the texts contained in this Anthology is the fact that their authors gave priority to the most imaginary stories among the hagiographic accounts of the Latin tradition. Thus, while our poems do not compare with contemporary secular genres such as courtly romance, they nonetheless belong to imaginative rather than religious literature.

The process of selection and adaptation that is the trademark of verse hagiography brings forth a number of important issues. A primary question is the precise exemplary value of the heroines commemorated in our poems. Most of these saintly women belong to a remote rather than to a recent past: all except Elizabeth of Hungary pertain, in fact, to the fourth and fifth centuries. Another important feature is the geographical setting of their stories, which almost exclusively take place in a faraway land, such as Asia Minor or Egypt. Temporal and spatial distance, therefore, are major components of the vernacular portrayal of female sanctity. What, then, did martyrs and hermits of ancient times and remote lands have in common with the thirteenth-century public that listened to their stories? Were these heroines to be imitated, or were they to be admired as exceptional embodiments of religious excellence? And why this preference for heroines of a bygone era, and the virtual exclusion of contemporary models?

The first part of this book considers these questions in a Commentary that analyzes the portrayal of female sanctity in the literary context of twelfth- and thirteenth-century France. Despite the apparently historical nature of their subject matter, our poems do not, in fact, convey the “truth” of the past, as much as they reflect the values of contemporary society. Their authors staged their stories in a setting that evokes northern Europe in the thirteenth century more than it does the pagan Roman empire or fifth-century Egypt. In rewriting the hagiographic accounts transmitted by the Latin tradition, they drew their themes and techniques of composition from secular literature, twelfth-century courtly romance in particular, since the genre was then the most popular mode of literary expression. Resulting from the interaction between secular and saintly narratives in the thirteenth century, our textual corpus marks the flourishing of hagiographic romance. The Commentary focuses on the meaning of hagiographic romance in

relation to the portrayal of female greatness within the Old French literary tradition. In contrast to the representation of male sanctity, which essentially entails self-assertiveness, female perfection appears to be grounded in bodily pain, silence, and passivity. The prevalence of those motifs suggests that the portrayal of female greatness in both secular and hagiographic romance is part and parcel of what can be characterized as an ideology of suffering. The Commentary explores some of the victimizing implications inherent in the exaltation of women in the predominantly male discourse of thirteenth-century Old French hagiography.

The second part of this work is a translation of the poems that were composed in honor of saintly women in thirteenth-century hagiographic romance. An appendix also offers a translation of the ninth-century *Se-quence of Saint Eulalia*, since this poem provides us with the first portrayal of woman in the vernacular tradition. A second appendix compiles all information on the thirteen Lives translated in the Anthology (typology of saints, origin of the saint's Life, hypothetical Latin sources, date and authorship of the French originals).

Note on the Translation

The surviving textual corpus of thirteenth-century hagiographic romance in Old French verse commemorates thirteen heroines, each of whom figures in this Anthology. Some of these women saints were particularly revered during the period and inspired several hagiographic accounts. In such cases, the account selected for translation was the most popular in terms of the number of manuscripts that preserve it and the relative fame of its author. A summary of each alternate version of the story is also included.

Most of the thirteen texts translated for this Anthology are selected excerpts. The selection focuses on passages that pertain most significantly to the portrayal of female perfection. Episodes that are not directly relevant to the presentation of the heroine but are essential to the story line have been summarized.

The Anthology consists of a line-for-line prose translation (hence the variable length of the lines in the translation) of original poems that have for the most part been edited. When several editions of a given text exist, the translation is based on the most recent or most complete one, and follows the line numbers proposed by the editor. Only minimal textual changes have been made in order to reflect the tone of the Old French

original. One of these changes addresses the tendency, characteristic of French authors writing in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, to refer to their characters by pronouns. For the sake of clarity, the translation often substitutes a noun or, when possible, a name. Another particularity of Old French is that meaning relies on case distinctions rather than word order. The translation often alters the syntactic structure of the original and reorganizes the sentence according to a subject-verb-object sequence. However, occasionally the word order of the original is maintained, in an effort to reproduce its poetic form (when a grammatical sentence covers several lines) or dramatic effect (when an enjambement emphasizes a particular word or expression). A third feature of the Old French original is the way grammatical tenses vary from sentence to sentence, or even within the same sentence. The translation often reproduces this variety, except when meaning requires the use of a specific grammatical tense.

Certain key words, such as honor, fair ("bel"), joy, love ("amur"), ire, riches, and saint, are repeated with great frequency in the original. The translation respects these repetitions, as well as the stylistic device of paired synonyms (e.g., "she was beautiful and fair") to which hagiographic romance, along with all secular texts composed during the period, likes to resort. Story lines, which unfold according to their own logic, are marked by frequent shiftings of scenes and by a wide usage of the Old French "si" with multiple different meanings (among others, "thus," "therefore," "so," "consequently," and "as"). Some idiomatic expressions need adaptation (e.g., "petit ne grant," in reference to one's social status, see *Faith*, l. 6: "of small or high condition"), while others are preserved in their genuine form (e.g., "Tout ne prise un trespas de vant," to express Elizabeth's detachment from the material world, for which she has no more care "than she would a breeze": see l. 1324). All of these characteristics of the original account for the somewhat stilted language of the English translation.

Notes

1. Some two hundred hagiographic poems have survived: see Paul Meyer's list of Saints' Lives in Old French Literature, verse and prose (1906), 328-458. [References are keyed to the Selected Bibliography.]
2. An important introduction to the subject is the collection of essays edited by Jack Goody (1968).
3. For an analysis of the oral character of literary communication in the early medieval period, see P. Zumthor (1984), 67-92.

4. On the formulaic character of verse narratives, see E. Vance (1986).
5. The literary language of northern France, the "langue d'oïl," was in fact a composite language that combined a number of dialectal features in varying proportions. By the thirteenth century, a prevailing dialect was the Francien, the language spoken in the Paris region, from which modern French derives. Other important dialects included the Picard, spoken in the northern regions of France, and the Anglo-Norman, the French spoken in England after the Norman Conquest in 1066. Intermingling dialectal forms characterized not only the texts as they were performed, but also their written transcriptions in manuscripts, according to the scribes' regional origins. In some instances, several copies of our poems have survived, as listed in the introductory note to each translation.
6. An informative treatment of the subject is E. Power's *Medieval Women* (1975). For a recent bibliography of scholarship focusing on the place and role of women in medieval society, see *Three Medieval Views of Women*, by G. K. Fiero, W. Pfeffer and M. Alain (1989), 149–65.
7. Hrotsvitha, a canoness of the Benedictine monastery of Gandersheim in Saxony is, by the virtue of her six plays, the first known dramatist of Western Europe. Her rhymed dramas, which focus on two recluses and four martyrs, include Paphnutius, which recounts the conversion of Thais; and Mary the Niece of Abraham, which recounts the conversion of Mary the Egyptian. Hrotsvitha also wrote a poem on Saint Agnes. See P. Dronke's analysis in *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (1984), 55–83.
8. Christine wrote a number of women's Saints Lives as part of her *Book of the City of Ladies* (1404–1405), among which figure six of the heroines celebrated in this Anthology (Barbara, Catherine of Alexandria, Christina, Euphrosina, Margaret of Antioch, and Marina).
9. An example is Margaret of Oingt, a mystic who died in 1310: see the translation of her writings by R. Blumenfeld-Kosinski (1990). C. Bynum's seminal analysis (1987) provides an in-depth exploration of these accounts.
10. For an analysis of *Audrey* and *Osyth*, see M. D. Legge (1963), 264–66, 251, and 259–61.
11. An interesting aspect of these devotional chronicles is the fact that, although authored by women, they offer quite a conventional characterization of female sanctity, in conformity with the views expressed in the male hagiographic tradition. For example, the Benedictine author of the *Life of Saint Osyth* "saw nothing strange in delivering an attack [. . .] on the frail nature of woman [. . .] in a work devoted to the praise of one of the species": see Legge (1963), 261.
12. Humanists such as Erasmus called into question the superstitious character of devotion to the saints in its popular manifestations, while the Church endeavored to clarify the saints' doctrinal significance at the Council of Trent (1545–1563). John Bolland, a Flemish Jesuit writer, undertook in 1643 to gather and edit all the Latin hagiographic documents of the medieval tradition, an enterprise which eventually produced the voluminous collection known as the *Acta Sanctorum*.
13. See, for example, the articles contained in the review *Analecta Bollandiana*.

14. Peter Brown's work (1982) offers a clear and succinct account of the social and political role of the saints in the early period of Latin Christianity. See also P. Delooz, *Sociologie et canonisations* (1969); and A. Vauchez, *La sainteté en Occident* (1981).

15. A valuable introduction to the medieval representation of holiness in its various manifestations is a collection of essays (1991) which brings together contributions by historians and literary experts, thus providing access to recent scholarship on the subject (*Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*, ed. R. Blumenfeld-Kosinski and T. Szell).

16. A number of articles offer informative summaries of vernacular hagiographic literature, such as S. C. Aston (1970) and J. D. M. Ford (1931–1932). On the production of Old French Saints' Lives, see P. Dembowski (1975); on English Saints' Lives, see E. Robertson (1990).

17. Of particular interest is Christine de Pizan's *Book of the City of Ladies*, since it offers a woman's perspective on the representation of female sanctity. The concluding section of this Commentary briefly considers the value of Christine's hagiographic accounts in relation to our textual corpus.

18. An exception is the eleventh-century *Life of Saint Alexis*, which has inspired and continues to inspire many critical studies. In contrast, the texts translated in this Anthology have attracted little scholarly attention, excluding the case of a relatively well-known writer such as Rutebeuf, the author of the *Life of Saint Mary the Egyptian* and of the *Life of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary* translated in this Anthology.

1. Holy Perfection in the Old French Tradition

The history of Old French hagiography is intricately linked to the rise and development of French literature. It is, in fact, a hagiographic poem, the ninth-century *Sequence of Saint Eulalia*, that marks the emergence of literary writing in the vernacular. Saints' Lives, which figure prominently in the entire literary production of medieval France, constitute a textual corpus of considerable variety. From the ninth to the fifteenth century, the genre evolved in a manner consistent with the changing nature of society. As noted in the Introduction, the form of the texts in this Anthology, including the use of verse and other indications such as the poet's asides to his audience, suggests that they were transmitted to illiterate audiences in the course of public recitations.¹

Before the spread of literacy as a mode of access to texts, not only verse hagiography, but in fact all of literary communication in the vernacular was essentially oral. That the early Old French production was grounded in orality does not mean, however, that works such as the ninth-century *Eulalia* represented a "popular" form of culture.² Orality was, in reality, an integral aspect of medieval society as a whole, including the Church. While the written word of the Scriptures played a dominant role in Christian culture, the Church also considered preaching to be one of its most important tasks. Christian culture implied, therefore, a kind of "literate orality"³ that granted equal importance to both the written and the spoken form of language. During the High Middle Ages, a "literate"—not necessarily "literary"—individual possessed a verbal competence that included the power to read, to write, and to speak with eloquence. This expertise provided the elite of the Church with direct access to the Scriptures and their interpretation.

The writing of vernacular Saints' Lives was, in that sense, a literate exercise, since it required the ability to interpret the Word of God as embodied in His saints and articulate this message for the benefit of illiterate listeners, as well as to transform the spoken word into a written text. A

poem like the ninth-century *Sequence of Saint Eulalia*, for example, derived its authority from the “literate orality” of the Christian tradition. For its anonymous author, the principal aim was not to create a literary masterpiece, but to participate in the propagation of God’s word.⁴

The religious character of Old French hagiography is noteworthy, for it explains its authoritative status during the formative period of vernacular literature. But the privileged role of hagiography as the main, if not sole, medium of reflection in the vernacular gradually diminished with the emergence and development of secular literature. Evolving social values, along with changing literary practices, effected a profound transformation of literary communication in the vernacular. From the ninth to the thirteenth century, the literary tastes and cultural expectations of the public underwent considerable change. By the time the poems translated in this Anthology were composed, hagiography—which continued to attract the attention of vernacular writers—was only one type of composition among the enormous number of texts, including fiction and history, verse and prose tales, songs and drama, that have survived from the early period of French literature. Factors such as the type of audiences for which these early literary works were intended, as well as their formal features and narrative contents, need to be examined in some detail, for they help to elucidate the place and function of our textual corpus within this remarkably diverse literary production.

A first element common to literary works composed during the early period of vernacular literature is the illiterate nature of their public. Yet, while they shared the characteristic of being listeners rather than readers, the audiences of an early hagiographic poem like the ninth-century *Eulalia*, of an epic poem like the eleventh-century *Song of Roland*, or of a twelfth-century romance like Chrétien de Troyes’s *Yvain* had neither the same notion of world order nor the same values. Since the significance of a text depended in part on its targeted public, as is the case of the feudal nobles entertained by twelfth-century secular fiction, an important issue is the identification of the type of audiences to which our poems might have been recited. Given the instructive function of hagiography, we can assume that these texts addressed the Christian community at large. The lessons conveyed by our poems are, indeed, of a general nature and serve to remind all believers, irrespective of their social status, of the necessity to lead a devout life. They articulate a moral message whose essential thrust is to provide the listeners with the means of avoiding sin and resisting temptation.

Every member of society, therefore, could reap benefit from these

devotional poems. Nonetheless, certain precisions occasionally suggest that the author was connected with a specific segment of medieval society. An example, cited in the Introduction, is the monastic context in which Gautier de Coinci wrote his *Life of Saint Christina*; another example is Rutebeuf's *Life of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary*, which he dedicated to the Queen of Navarre. Yet, such precisions do not mean that these two poems were recited exclusively to their targeted listeners, nor that their moral content was accordingly restricted. The prologue of the *Life of Saint Faith* is, in that sense, emblematic. Beyond the apparent specificity of the audience to which he speaks (the "lords" mentioned at line 1), it is clear that the hagiographer has composed a work of universal significance: "You know for a certainty, / That no one in this world, / Whether old or young, of small or high condition, / Will be safe, if he does not believe" (ll. 4–7). The audiences instructed by the reciting of verse Saints' Lives included men and women, nobles and non-nobles, lay people and religious clerics, whose access to culture similarly depended on oral communication.

Considering, however, the common subject matter of the textual corpus translated in this Anthology, which focuses on female virtue, it appears that our poems conveyed a message that had particular significance for medieval women. That the heroines' exemplary achievement offered women helpful guidance on the way to conduct their lives is confirmed by the author of the *Life of Saint Paula*, who emphasizes his story's specific value for the female members of the public. Talking of his text as a "mirror," a metaphor of the saint's exemplary behavior,⁵ the poet proceeds to explain its moral significance: "Ladies should contemplate themselves in it. / For they can learn a lesson / —Those who are attentive— / From how Saint Paula led her life, / Avoiding covetousness and envy, / Pride, concupiscence and avarice" (ll. 1223–28). Our textual corpus thus provides us with valuable information on what constituted proper and improper female behavior in the society of thirteenth-century northern Europe.

Another characteristic common to most of the literary works composed during the early period of French literature is their verse form. Yet, the use of verse served widely different purposes. There is, indeed, little in common between the *Sequence of Saint Eulalia*, which commemorates a young Spanish martyr in twenty-nine irregular verses, and a typical twelfth-century romance like Chrétien de Troyes's *Lancelot*, which recounts its hero's quest for love and chivalric adventures in a narrative that numbers over ten thousand octosyllabic lines. Only in vernacular poetry, a genre initiated by the troubadours in eleventh-century southern France, did the

verse take on a lyrical quality. In contrast to lyric poetry, whose central topic involved the exaltation of the composer as both lover and poet, other genres such as hagiography and courtly romance had, above all, a didactic function. But the “instructive” value of these two types of verse narratives undoubtedly did not have the same significance. Seen against the writing of Saints’ Lives, which claimed to be a devotional rather than literary exercise, courtly narratives sought to glorify the writer’s auctorial as well as inventive merit and the audience’s capacity to appreciate and interpret the often complex realm of romance. Beyond its entertainment value, the recounting of chivalric adventures thus served to confirm the growing prestige of the vernacular language as a medium endowed with intellectual and artistic qualities. Courtly authors such as Chrétien de Troyes in the latter part of the century called attention to the deep significance of their narratives, thereby prompting the hearers to act as interpreters.

The claim that secular literature was capable of conveying and inspiring serious philosophical reflection considerably affected the prestige heretofore imparted exclusively to vernacular works of a religious nature, hagiography in particular. Our textual corpus contains proof that, by the thirteenth century, hagiography had lost its status as a privileged vehicle of vernacular communication. In the opening lines of the *Life of Saint Barbara* (ll. 3–8), for example, the anonymous author endeavors to contrast his poem with traditional stories of secular literature, such as the *Song of Roland*, in a manner suggestive of an implicit competition between hagiographic and imaginative literature. Of particular interest is the author’s insistence that his is “a new kind of story, / Never heard before.” Since Old French Saints’ Lives affirmed their authenticity on the basis of a long-established Latin hagiographic tradition,⁶ it appears that the “novelty” of the author’s poem resides not so much in its subject matter as in its specific expression. The story of Saint Barbara may have been unknown to his public. Most probably, however, the author’s claim that his poem is “new” serves as a strategy whose aim is to arouse and sustain the audience’s interest. In the hagiographer’s view, the listeners should pay attention to a narrative that recounts the authentic story of a holy individual, rather than to obsolete and imaginary tales.

It is noteworthy that the poet of *Barbara* names the *Song of Roland* as the epitome of a type of literary production that has no historical or instructive value. His criticism of the epic tradition raises a number of questions. Considering, first, the relatively “historical” authenticity of the *Song of Roland*—which commemorates an eleventh-century view of Charle-

magne's contribution to the triumph of Christianity—in contrast to the openly acknowledged inventiveness of romance writing, why does our hagiographer focus on the epic tradition and not on romance, then the most popular form of entertainment? Second, why contrast his narrative, whose protagonist is a “holy maiden,” to the decidedly masculine character of epic heroism and not to the courtly ladies exalted in romance?

In fact, our hagiographer's disparaging views on the epic genre echo those expressed earlier by twelfth-century writers of romance. At issue was the historical authenticity and literary value of vernacular compositions, such as the *Song of Roland*, that represented a strictly oral tradition. In the increasingly textualized environment of vernacular literature in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, only the written text was considered capable of transmitting culturally relevant substance.⁷ While literary communication was still oral, writers of romance initiated a new linguistic model of authority, one based on written rather than spoken language. The emphasis on the written form of language as a guarantee of authenticity already existed in the vernacular hagiographic tradition. An illustration is the hagiographers' long-standing practice, mentioned above, of beginning their narrative by referring to a Latin source in order to convince the audience of the veracity of the story. But secular authors developed quite a different definition of textual truth, one that was set apart from the “literate orality” of Christian culture and more closely resembled our modern understanding of literary creation. Imaginative literature, twelfth-century courtly romance in particular, thus contributed to the introduction of a secular notion of verbal authority. For courtly writers, the written form of romance was sufficient validation of its cultural relevance, while its value was determined by the author's ability to give a new meaning and structure to traditional materials.

Paradoxically, this is precisely what the poet of *Barbara* endeavors to do when he claims to present “a new kind of story, / Never heard before.” Thus, his criticism of the epic tradition belies, in fact, the reality of his use of the compositional techniques of romance, that is, the meter of his poem and the typically courtly characterization of his heroine. The tendency of thirteenth-century verse hagiography to imitate the techniques introduced and developed by twelfth-century fiction deserves notice, for it discloses the growing preeminence of imaginative literature as a model of literary composition in the vernacular. The fact that the poet of *Barbara* resorts to the octosyllabic verse that is the formal feature of twelfth-century romance, rather than to the decasyllabic verse typical of the early epic tradition,

suggests that he recognizes the popularity of romance as a genre of high cultural prestige. His introduction of Saint Barbara as a “very courteous and beautiful” maiden reveals that he attempts to emulate romance by endowing his heroine with qualities that were typically imparted to the ladies exalted in the courtly tradition. In reality, each of the heroines commemorated in our Anthology, even those exalted in the few poems that do not use the octosyllabic verse, similarly possesses physical and social attributes that evoke the chivalric world depicted in twelfth-century courtly romance, rather than the specific environment in which their story is supposed to take place.

Thus, an interesting consequence of our hagiographers’ efforts to emulate secular romance is their emphasis on the written word not only for its historical and instructive value, as was the case of early hagiographic writings, but also for its role in validating the cultural relevance of their works. In the prologue of the *Life of Saint Barbara*, for example, it is not the story of Saint Barbara itself that is “new,” but the manner in which the hagiographer succeeds in adapting his material, thereby composing an original narrative. The author of the *Life of Saint Agnes* similarly stresses the innovative value of his rendition: “You will hear a story of her life composed in a novel manner.”⁸ The literary practices involved in the writing of Saints’ Lives in the thirteenth century represent, therefore, an attempt to produce stories that were both instructive and attractive. Evidence of this attempt is provided by the poet of the *Life of Catherine of Alexandria*, who defines his role as cultural transmitter in terms of an ability to translate her story from Latin into French “in a way most pleasant to hear / For its listeners” (ll. 16–17), and also by Rutebeuf, the author of our *Elizabeth of Hungary*, when he expresses his desire “to recount my story [. . .] in a way most pleasing” to Isabelle of Navarre, to whom he dedicates his poem (ll. 13–17). The hagiographers’ efforts to sustain the interest of the hearers through narratives that proved to possess literary merits contributed to increase the value of hagiographic writing as a literary exercise, but at the risk of reducing its devotional function. Aware of this danger, thirteenth-century writers of Saints’ Lives frequently reaffirm the selfless character of their enterprise. For instance, Gui, the author of our *Catherine of Alexandria*, concludes his narrative by stating that “he did not compose his poem to increase his fame, / In imitation of the sinful practices of this world, / For his single goal is to avoid vainglory.”⁹ Gui depreciates secular writings as a production that serves to glorify both the authors of courtly narratives and their listeners. In the poet’s view, hagiographic writings are

superior because they valorize humility, that of the poet himself and that of his public as they acknowledge the saint's extraordinary virtue.

Equally dangerous was the technique of amplification, another trademark of vernacular hagiography as the genre developed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In their attempt to enliven the basic story line transmitted by the Latin hagiographic tradition, vernacular poets often expanded (or even invented) certain episodes, thus transforming their textual sources into narratives as replete with adventures and dramatic events as were, typically, courtly romances. A comparison between Gautier de Coinci's adaptation of the *Life of Saint Christina* and the Latin documents on which Gautier's poem is loosely based reveals a significant number of additions in the French text, most of which contribute to increasing the evocative effects of the story. Among other innovations, the heroine's aristocratic distinction is an important feature in Gautier's rendition. Her beauty and courteous qualities incite her tormentors' desire to seduce and possess her, while eliciting an emotive response on the part of both intra-textual onlookers and the audience of Gautier's poem. Most of our poems rely on amplification as a means to attract the attention of the public, at the expense, it appears, of the instructive value that was supposed to distinguish hagiographic from secular writings. An indication of the popularity of this technique in the thirteenth-century hagiographic production is provided in one of the five extant poems that were composed in commemoration of Saint Catherine of Alexandria. At the end of his narrative, the author tells his audience that he faithfully reproduced the written document in which he found her Life. He also adds, however, the following plea: "If I have altered, by adding or cutting, / The written text of my source, / May God forgive me" (ll. 2323–27).¹⁰ The poet's acknowledgement that his account is not altogether faithful suggests the presence, by the thirteenth century, of a radically different approach to hagiographic writing. Authenticity was no longer exclusively grounded in a Latin textual tradition; it also involved a certain degree of creative virtuosity, one that evoked and imitated the compositional practices that characterized the writing of romance.

A profound transformation of the notion of textual truth was, meanwhile, altering the compositional practices of secular writers. Most important was the debate over the relative merits of verse and prose, a debate that emerged in vernacular writing at the end of the twelfth century. Essentially, medieval thought conceived of prose as the vehicle of truth, while associating verse with fiction and falsehood. Gradually, vernacular culture itself

began to establish a similar contrast between these two forms of literary communication. Verse was the realm of fiction and orality, while only prose was able to convey truth. The gradual intrusion of prose into what had been the domain of narrative verse is attested in the thirteenth century by a specific phenomenon in secular fiction: the rewriting of twelfth-century romances, now recounted in lengthy prose narratives whose ultimate aim was to stimulate discussion and reflection on the human condition.¹¹ In time, vernacular hagiography itself showed a preference for prose over verse. The preeminence of prose in both the secular and hagiographic vernacular production of the late Middle Ages suggests that, with the spread of literacy, reading in private was beginning to rival or replace recitals in public.¹² However, the appearance of prose Saints' Lives is a belated phenomenon. While secular writers adopted prose as an alternative medium of literary expression during the early thirteenth century, by and large prose hagiography in the vernacular only began to develop at the end of that century.¹³

Within the surviving textual corpus of Old French verse hagiography, the thirteenth century marks the climax of the genre, given the superior quantity and variety of hagiographic poems that date from this period, as well as the number of renditions inspired by particularly popular saints such as Margaret of Antioch and Catherine of Alexandria.¹⁴ After the golden age of the genre, surviving poems radically diminished in number, and so did the hagiographers' narrative invention. With very few exceptions, most of these later verse Lives concern characters and stories already treated in the thirteenth-century production. This production, including the poems translated in this Anthology, represents, therefore, a textual corpus of considerable interest for the understanding of the role and function of the cult of the saints as they inspired the development of "hagiographic romance." Considering the growing preference shown by thirteenth-century secular writers for prose, a literary expression that had, in their view, greater intellectual value than verse, and considering also the increasingly instructive nature of secular verse narratives during the period, it appears that both the verse form and compositional practices of our textual corpus bear the mark of obsolescence. The conservative character of hagiographic romance thus calls for a comparison with the type of literary composition to which it is most closely linked, that is, the courtly narratives rendered popular by twelfth-century writers of fiction.

Before examining the resemblances between secular and hagiographic romance, however, we need to trace briefly the evolution of vernacular

hagiography in relation to the portrayal of perfection. A typical hagiographic poem, the eleventh-century *Life of Saint Alexis*, will help to determine the specific components that distinguish holy heroism from secular heroism. Focusing on the ninth-century *Sequence of Saint Eulalia*, the earliest extant work in the history of hagiography as well as secular French literature, a subsequent section will then assess the differences that separate the portrayal of male perfection, as embodied by Saint Alexis, from the portrayal of female perfection. Lastly, in examining the gradual transformation of Old French hagiography into hagiographic romance in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, we will consider some of the repercussions that this transformation effected on the representation of female sanctity and on its exemplary function.

Sanctity and Self-Sacrifice: The Life of Saint Alexis

The representation of greatness is a fundamental component of the literary works composed in the language of northern France.¹⁵ Among the genres representative of the early period of Old French literature, epics, courtly romances, and hagiographic poems similarly exalt in their protagonists virtues and qualities that surpass human norms. Although the significance and function of the portrayal of greatness vary according to genre, the protagonists of this literary production in the main share the same ability to achieve excellence. Roland, the hero of the earliest extant epic song of the French tradition, manifests his greatness through martial deeds that contribute to the victory of Charlemagne's Christian empire against the pagans. For a typical courtly hero like Lancelot, the quest for excellence entails his engagement in a series of chivalric exploits in support of King Arthur's realm of peace and order. It is to the extent that the epic, courtly, or hagiographic protagonist succeeds in triumphing over adversity that he or she occupies center stage.

Saintly perfection, however, evokes a form of excellence quite different from that achieved by the protagonists of secular literature. If all heroes and heroines are by definition exceptional, only in the case of the saints does exception coincide with, and result from, a denial of the self. Unlike the outstanding characters celebrated in the epic and courtly genres, the saints commemorated in verse hagiography seek not to attain fame in this world, but salvation in the next. Worldly glory is, by contrast, an integral part of the secular portrayal of greatness. An emblematic example is Roland, who,

despite the Christian environment in which his story takes place, remains a warrior concerned with his renown and social prestige. But hagiographic accounts bespeak a widely different context to the extent that a spiritual calling motivates their saintly protagonists to forsake the temporal world and renounce its values. Estrangement, abnegation, quest for silence and solitude serve, in their case, as shields that protect them from temptation, thereby guaranteeing their access to God in Heaven.

Thus, while today the concept of sanctity evokes images of altruism and selfless dedication, in its Old French depiction sanctity exclusively honors those exemplary individuals who elected to remove themselves from society and to live a life of sacrifice. What all the holy protagonists of the vernacular hagiographic production have in common is that they stand above ordinary humanity in their commitment and ability to lead a virtuous mode of existence. The extraordinary component of their achievement indicates that they did not serve as models to be imitated, but as figures to be admired. To a certain extent, this is also true of the protagonists of secular literature, in conformity with the martial and chivalric distinction that raises them above the commonplace. Yet, although superior to the average listener to whom their stories were recited, nonetheless epic or courtly heroes also reflect, in a faithful and albeit idealized manner, the mores and customs of feudal society at the specific time when these texts were composed. By contrast, saintly protagonists represent a mode of conduct that radically differs from the norm, in nature as well as in quality, precisely because they reject or avoid the temporal world.

Detachment from the world is, indeed, an essential component of Alexis' progress on the road to sanctity in the eleventh-century poem (circa 1050) that recounts his life.¹⁶ Each one of the hero's actions demonstrates his relentless desire to flee society, to live a life of poverty, and to devote himself to the service of God. The poem narrates how Alexis, a noble Roman who abandons his wife on their wedding night, leaves for Syria where he spends seventeen years in silence and solitude, and returns home unrecognized, to live a further seventeen years as a beggar. Like the tenth-century Latin prose narrative (*Vita Sancti Alexii*)¹⁷ that is generally regarded as its source, the Old French Life extols the virtues of abnegation and worldly renunciation. But the French text goes even further than the Latin *Vita* in stressing the difference between the saint and ordinary humanity.¹⁸ Whereas in the *Vita* Alexis' parents display saintly attitudes, in the French adaptation they are exclusively concerned with family ambitions regarding their only heir. For example, in discovering that the beggar who

lived in their home was in fact Alexis, the hero's parents mourn his death in a manner that reveals the exclusively worldly nature of their concerns. The reaction of Eufemiien, Alexis' father, bespeaks the lament of a feudal lord in considering the extent of his loss: "O my son, who will possess my great estate, / My extensive lands, of which I owned so many, / My great palace in the city of Rome? [. . .] You should have worn helmet and mail, / Girt on a sword like the rest of your peers, / And you should have ruled over a great household, / Have carried the emperor's banner, / As your father did and your ancestors" (ll. 401-15). Whereas Alexis' parents are prey to human emotions, either when they rejoice at the idea that their only heir is about to marry "the daughter of a noble lord" (l. 40) or when they lament his disappearance, the hero himself displays a constant aloofness from the realm of feelings.¹⁹ Rarely does Alexis communicate with his fellow human beings, an exception being the admonition he delivers to his betrothed on the wedding night: "Have him for your spouse / Who redeemed us with his precious blood. / In this world there is no perfect love; / Life is fragile; it holds no lasting glory; / This sort of happiness turns into great sadness" (ll. 66-70).

Opposition between the temporal and the spiritual world thus plays a major role in articulating the extraordinary nature of Alexis' achievement. The rhythmic pattern of the poem, which numbers 625 decasyllabic lines grouped into stanzas,²⁰ also contributes to separation of the sacred from the secular. A caesura regularly divides the decasyllabic line after the fourth syllable, thus creating an acoustic effect designed to stress Alexis' exceptional indifference to wealth and glory. Line 95, which states that "With no possession // Does he wish to be burdened," is a typical example of this process. In the social environment of northern France in the eleventh century, Alexis is, indeed, an exceptional case. His refusal of marriage contradicts both the genealogical duties expected of a feudal heir and the more general obligation of the laity to procreate. It is because of this uncommon behavior that he earns the attribute of sainthood.

Alexis' holiness is further confirmed in the section that narrates his sojourn in the Holy Land. Of particular interest is the episode describing the circumstances that lead to the hero's eventual return to Rome. Just at the moment when Alexis rejoices at having found, in the Syrian city of Edessa, a haven where he can serve God in anonymity and poverty, God, "because of his love for him," endeavors to reveal the hero's saintliness (ll. 168-95). The report that "a man of God" lives in Edessa prompts everyone, "both great and humble," to come and revere Alexis. In contrast to the

manner in which secular romances endeavor to celebrate their heroes, public recognition of Alexis' merit has a spiritual and not a worldly character. From the saint's perspective, however, public admiration is just as intrusive as were oppressive, earlier, the wealth, lineal renown, and social status that his parents wanted him to enjoy. He does not wish, in his words, "to burden myself once more," any more than he wishes, once he reaches Rome, to let his family "burden him with the honors of this world." The hero's contempt for the terrestrial world thus inspires him to act and react in a manner that implicitly posits an equivalence between sanctity and self-assertiveness. Alexis' saintly achievement is the result of his determination to reject his noble lineage in favor of an obscure existence.

Another salient feature of heroic sanctity as it is articulated in the *Life of Saint Alexis* is the Christological character of the protagonist's achievement. Several elements in the poem indicate that the author intended to stress the Christ-like quality of the hero's story. We note, first, that Alexis spends thirty-four years as a "man of God," a number that directly evokes, considering the medieval tendency to calculate inclusively,²¹ Christ's age at the time of His death. Alexis' decision to leave for the Holy Land is a second index of the Christly "orientation," in the concrete sense of the term, by means of which the saint undertakes his quest for the divine realm. Most significant, in that regard, is the poem's scriptural resonance in the section that narrates Alexis' life as an unrecognized beggar under the stairs of Eufemii's house: "His father's servants, who served the household, / Throw their dirty water on his head. [. . .] He does not become angry in the slightest, this most holy man, / Rather he prays to God that he might forgive them / In his mercy, for they know not what they do" (ll. 263–70).²² In imitation of Christ, Alexis becomes an exemplary model of self-sacrifice. Not only does he refuse his fate as the son of a noble lord, he also willingly endures (and successfully withstands) such ordeals as exile, poverty, and ultimately humiliation.

Alexis' entire earthly existence thus betokens a desire to eradicate his terrestrial identity in order to be granted a spiritual one. The less visible he becomes to his fellow human beings, the closer he approaches God's realm. Only after his death does Alexis let his merit be recognized, first by the citizens of Rome and, centuries later, by the believers who honor his memory. The posthumous nature of this revelation is noteworthy, for it stresses the humble character of Alexis' greatness, as opposed to heroes of secular literature such as Roland, whose excellence is intricately connected with worldly renown. That the full revelation of the saint's merit is a *post*

mortem phenomenon also emphasizes the mediating, rather than imitable, value of sanctity as it is represented in the *Life of Saint Alexis*. In contrast to the protagonist's constant aloofness during his earthly life, his role after death takes on an active function, as Alexis becomes a source of cures and salvation for all those who call upon him or touch his body (ll. 551–59). Of utmost importance for his eventual transformation into a saint endowed with intercessory powers is Alexis' decision to record his own story. When he knows that the time has come for him to join God in Heaven, he calls for ink, pen, and parchment, and "In the letter he writes all about himself. [. . .] He keeps it on himself, he does not wish to reveal it, / So that he may not become known until after he is gone" (ll. 281–87). The following episode recounts the circumstances in which the people of Rome are miraculously told that a holy man is to be found in the house of Eufemien, and that discovering him will prevent the city from collapsing in ruins. Eufemien sees his son's body without recognizing him and notices that Alexis holds a letter in his hand, but is unable to remove it. Only the pope succeeds in retrieving the document, which is then read aloud to an admiring citizenry.

This episode reflects the capital importance of literacy as a prerequisite for contact with the divine. The French poem establishes a clear analogy between Alexis and the pope, both characters being equally instrumental in insuring the communication between the City of Man and the City of God. Religious excellence and literacy are, in that sense, synonymous, effecting a decisive separation between the temporal and spiritual worlds. The ability to speak to God and to speak of God is reserved for a select few: the saint, because of his closeness to God and because he writes down his own story; the pope, who, as the most eminent representative of the temporal Church, orchestrates the mediation between the saint and the faithful; and the hagiographer, because of his religious and cultural training.²³ By contrast, the inability of Alexis' father to take the letter symbolizes the ignorance and illiteracy of the rest of the community both within and outside the poem. The sole verbal activity of the witnesses to whom Alexis' sanctity is revealed, including the listeners who hear the Old French account, consists in invoking Alexis' intercession, as revealed in the poet's final apostrophe to his public: "My lords, let us keep alive the memory of that holy man, / And let us pray that he deliver us from all evil; / That in this life he may obtain for us peace and joy, / And in that other one, everlasting glory / In the Word itself. And so let us say: *Pater Noster. Amen*" (ll. 621–25). The epilogue emphasizes the value of prayer yet openly distinguishes between, on the one hand, the inventive character of Alexis' discourse (since he will hence-

forth speak to God on the believers' behalf) and, on the other hand, the public's reliance on invocation of his name and on liturgical recitation ("Pater Noster"). By writing an autobiographical letter, Alexis the clerk has disclosed the existence of Alexis the saint. In both capacities, he represents a level of competence and excellence that the illiterate audiences of northern Europe in the eleventh century could neither imitate nor emulate.

The story of Peter Waldo and the origin of the Waldensian movement indicate, indeed, that Alexis' achievement constituted an exception, rather than a type of conduct to be imitated by the average believer.²⁴ Two documents, dating from 1173 and from the mid-thirteenth century respectively, recount how the public recital of a vernacular *Life of Saint Alexis* inspired Peter Waldo (an illiterate man living in Lyons in the 1170s) to give away his money and property, to leave his wife and two daughters, and to adopt a life of poverty and itinerant preaching. These accounts show how the reciting of vernacular Lives could and sometimes did affect their listeners, prompting them to seek inner perfection and to model their conduct on these exemplary heroes. Yet, far from applauding Waldo's imitation of Alexis, the authors of these documents criticize his behavior. Not only did Waldo undertake to instruct his community, he also sent illiterate and uneducated men and women to preach in nearby villages. It is precisely this course of action that the chroniclers contest, to the extent that Waldo and his followers were usurping a function reserved for the religious clergy. Members of the laity were not supposed to engage in pedagogic activities nor to acquire, as Waldo did, vernacular translations of the Bible, for want of the appropriate exegetic expertise. By developing their own interpretation of doctrine, Waldo and his disciples propagated, in the chroniclers' view, a message that lacked orthodoxy, endangered the instructive mission of the Church, and was, therefore, condemned by its spokesmen.

These documents also demonstrate that the audiences of vernacular hagiographic texts such as the eleventh-century *Life of Saint Alexis* were not asked to imitate the saints, for when they did, as in Waldo's case, they were regarded as potentially dangerous social agitators. Proper behavior in their case involved practical rather than spiritual activities and charitable acts such as almsgiving, housing the homeless, and clothing the poor.²⁵ The reciting of Saints' Lives thus served to confirm the subordinate role of the average Christian. Whereas illiteracy constituted a major obstacle to the attainment of an unmediated form of communication between the believers and the Deity, linguistic competence empowered both the saints and their hagiographers to channel the communication between Heaven and earth.

Considering the illiterate status of most of the listeners, women in particular, for whom our poems were composed, the portrayal of female perfection that is the subject of the texts translated in this Anthology deserves particular attention for it reflects, in and of itself, contradictory attitudes toward the role and place of women in medieval society. Does this portrayal empower these heroines to act as mediators, thus gaining a preeminence that they were not supposed, or not encouraged, to have in contemporary medieval society? Are self-sacrifice, distancing from the world, and the ability to speak to and of God integral aspects of their achievement? And does the revelatory process that signals them to the attention of both their surrounding community and the thirteenth-century public have, in their case, the same function as in stories that commemorate male saints? A preliminary answer to those questions is provided in the ninth-century *Sequence of Saint Eulalia*. It is, therefore, to the representation of female perfection as articulated in this earliest extant document of Old French literature that we must now turn.

Sanctity and Forced Sacrifice: The Sequence of Saint Eulalia

The prominence of early martyrs in Old French hagiography indicates that self-sacrifice played a prevailing role in the vernacular portrayal of saintly greatness. For medieval audiences, however, martyrdom was also the most remote expression of Christian faith. Considering, for instance, that some ten centuries separated the public from the martyrs celebrated in our textual corpus, what kind of lessons did these texts convey to their audiences? At issue is the exemplary value of the heroic holy individuals who died during the persecutions of early Christianity.

Temporal distance is a salient component of the French poem that commemorates, for the benefit of its ninth-century public, the martyrdom of Eulalia, a young Spanish maiden who was tortured and burned to death in Merida around the year 304.²⁶ The monastic context, however, in which the poem was composed and performed in part alleviates the alien elements inherent in the story line. While the *Sequence of Saint Eulalia* exalts death by martyrdom as the ultimate Christian achievement, it also implicitly glorifies monastic life. The poem originates from Saint-Amand, a Benedictine abbey in northern France which actively contributed to the development of a particular religious production: the Latin *trope*. Tropes were, essentially, compositions that sought to interpret a given liturgical text, either through

amplification, or through the creation of an additional, new text. In its latter meaning, the trope is the probable origin of the concept of literary invention in the vernacular. It is also this meaning that is evoked in tropes known as *sequences*, compositions that served as musical and, ultimately, textual extensions of the liturgy.

The *Sequence of Saint Eulalia* is an example of the development of the tropes as textual amplifications commemorating the saints of the Christian tradition. The *Sequence* is an adaptation of a Latin poem also composed at the Saint-Amand abbey around the years 881–882. We can surmise that each of these texts, which are preserved in the same manuscript, addressed a different audience within the monastic community. The need for a French version of the Passion²⁷ of Saint Eulalia suggests that the *Sequence* was composed for those monks of the Saint-Amand abbey who could be qualified as illiterate. It was in part the recognition that a large portion of medieval society had no knowledge of Latin that prompted the growing practice of preaching in the vulgar tongue (the “rusticam romanam linguam” cited by the Council of Tours in 813).

Illiteracy in the Middle Ages was not, therefore, an exclusively lay phenomenon; nor was the oral character of the *Sequence* a sign of artlessness. The poem is an articulate, albeit concise, evocation of Eulalia's virtue. It glorifies renunciation in a manner consistent with the ascetic message conveyed, two centuries later, in the more elaborate *Life of Saint Alexis*. On many counts, however, the *Sequence* differs from *Alexis* in its approach to, and depiction of, the notion of holy perfection. Most noteworthy is the diverging role imparted to the world of the flesh as a means of assessing the protagonist's virtue. Eulalia is, first and foremost, the victim of her own corporeal beauty. Whereas Alexis' physical transformation allows him to become invisible, as we saw above, the heroine remains to the end the object of her tormentors' scrutiny. Taking into account that *Eulalia* commemorates a martyr and not a hermit, our heroine's central position has a narrative justification. Yet the fact that she is a martyr does not justify the prominent role played by her fleshly appearance. As will become clear in the following chapters of this commentary, corporeal beauty is an essential part of the portrayal of female sanctity in the Old French hagiographic production, a part that has no equivalent in the Lives of the male saints, martyrs as well as non-martyr protagonists like Alexis. It appears that Eulalia's maidenly character (mentioned in the first line of the poem), rather than her faith, is the principal element that attracts the pagans' attention, thus propelling the heroine onto center stage.

The *Sequence* unfolds through a series of dramatic actions that stress

the potency of Eulalia's persecutors, while portraying her as a powerless victim. She is "brought before Maximian" and compelled to submit to his tyranny; and at the end of the trial scene, the anonymous poet observes that she does not "contest" Maximian's order that she be beheaded. Eulalia, therefore, displays none of Alexis' self-assertiveness; neither does her story take the confrontational form characteristic of a typical Latin Passion.²⁸ Her portrayal is a passive one. Another crucial difference between the *Sequence* and *Alexis* is the minimal role played by Eulalia's oratorical expertise. Ignoring the symbolic significance of her name (Eulalia: "she who speaks well"), the *Sequence* alludes to the interrogation scene that constitutes the climax of traditional Latin Passions, but without transcribing the speeches uttered by the heroine. In contrast to the Latin Passions, which privilege the martyrs' eloquence as well as their propensity to submerge their personal identity in the service of God,²⁹ the French poem significantly reduces the first of these two narrative conventions while imparting to the second a victimizing function. Seen against Alexis' ability to transform the flesh into word, as illustrated by his autobiographical activity, Eulalia's religious excellence during her earthly existence does not combine with verbal competence in either its textual or verbal manifestations. Thus, the biographical section of the *Sequence* marginalizes the saint and confines her to silence.

The earliest surviving document of French literature precludes, therefore, the portrayal of a strong and active female presence. Only after her death does Eulalia's eloquence become manifest, when the epilogue of the poem enjoins its listeners to "pray to her that she may pray for us, / So that Christ have mercy on us / After death" (ll. 26–28). Female speech, a posthumous phenomenon, is located in Heaven and, consequently, set at a safe distance from earthly reality. On the basis of this document, it appears that the vernacular depiction of female sanctity bespeaks forced sacrifice, rather than self-sacrifice, to the extent that the heroine functions as a powerless victim whose death engenders life for those who invoke her name. The enjambment of lines 27 and 28, which places the emphasis on the "after-death," signals that the believers turn to Eulalia as a means of deferring, as much as possible, the event of their own physical death. Eulalia's sacrifice does not engender, in a Christ-like fashion, the spiritual redemption of mankind; nor does it serve, as in *Alexis*, to insure the protection of Rome, the seat of the Church. In the *Sequence*, the attribute of sainthood entails a process of victimization in the course of which the heroine must die for the others to survive.

Distinguishing the circumstances conducive to male and female sanc-

tity, as do the *Sequence of Saint Eulalia* and the *Life of Saint Alexis*, and identifying female virtue in strictly passive and corporeal terms can in effect be viewed as an effort to restrict women's active participation in the intellectual, institutional, and moral welfare of medieval society. This assessment presupposes, however, that both *Eulalia* and *Alexis* are representative of the entire verse hagiographic production. Based on the popularity of the story of Alexis within that production, it appears that the ascetic hero of the eleventh-century poem is, indeed, a typical representation of male sanctity. The story inspired multiple metric renditions from the eleventh to the fourteenth century, an indication that the hero remained an emblematic figure of holy perfection throughout the climactic period of verse hagiography.³⁰ A hagiographic document composed in the thirteenth century—the *Life of Saint Jehan Paulus*—confirms Alexis' role as holy paradigm, since its anonymous author explicitly cites Alexis as the model on which he bases the portrayal of his own hero.³¹ Given that *Jehan Paulus* is a legend with no known Latin antecedent, the poet's characterization of his hero discloses the highly intertextual character of hagiographic writing in the thirteenth century.

The women saints of the Old French tradition present a different case, *Eulalia* being the sole extant female Saint's Life before the twelfth century. We need, therefore, to consider the texts that were composed some three centuries after the first surviving vernacular portrayal of a holy woman in order to assess whether the Old French hagiographic production evolved in a manner that produced a different, and more active, representation of female perfection.

Hagiographic Romance in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries

Although fewer in number than men, saintly women figure prominently in the Old French hagiographic tradition, particularly in the thirteenth-century verse production, the golden age of the genre. The textual corpus that has survived from this period is quantitatively significant, since it exalts thirteen women saints, in contrast with the five previously celebrated.³² And many of the heroines praised during the late Middle Ages³³ are in fact modeled after those who constitute the principal subject of this book. Another demonstration of the popularity of certain women Saints' Lives composed in the thirteenth century is the number of manuscripts that contain them. For example, more than one hundred manuscripts preserve

one particular rendition of the story of Saint Margaret.³⁴ In several instances, the same saintly legend inspired multiple hagiographic poems, as in the case of Margaret, whose story is commemorated in eight alternate versions.³⁵

However, not all of our thirteen heroines were new in the French literary tradition. Three of them (Catherine, Margaret, and Mary the Egyptian) already figure in the surviving hagiographic material of the twelfth century³⁶ and remained highly popular during the centuries following.³⁷ The persistence of certain heroic figures throughout the hagiographic tradition reveals the renown of these particular saints, while also testifying to the intertextual nature of the vernacular hagiographic production, as exemplified by Alexis' role as textual exemplar in the *Life of Saint Jehan Paulus*. Duplication and amplification (which are, as we saw above, two important components of hagiographic writing in the twelfth and, especially, in the thirteenth century) play, in fact, a similarly fundamental role in the writing of secular verse narratives.³⁸ This similarity in terms of narrative practice results from a concept of originality in part defined, by hagiographers and authors of courtly romance alike, as the ability to innovate on the basis of an established canon. Retelling a known story and giving it a new significance is, indeed, an essential characteristic of literary composition in the vernacular during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Hence the narrative resemblance between hagiographic and secular texts, and specifically, between hagiography and romance.

An indication of the interaction between hagiography and romance is the tendency of courtly literature either to secularize saintly characters³⁹ or to sanctify secular heroes, as is the case of the thirteenth-century metamorphosis of Chrétien's chivalric hero into the "seeker of an ideal which in fact resembles sainthood."⁴⁰ In their attempt to ennoble secular literature and, by extension, its aristocratic public, courtly writers thus appropriated concepts and ideals traditionally associated with the language of authority. The Christian interpretation of the Grail legend in thirteenth-century romances remains an emblematic illustration of this process.⁴¹ As noted in the Introduction, vernacular hagiography consequently lost its privileged status as one of the most influential vehicles of reflection in the vernacular. To sustain the interest of the public in devotional narratives, authors of Saints' Lives gradually resorted to compositional practices that were the trademarks of secular romance. This imitative enterprise had the paradoxical result of increasing the entertainment value of hagiography. While the goal of romance was gradually to reproduce the complexities of inner life,

writers of Saints' Lives showed a pronounced tendency to develop the imaginary and fictional elements contained in the hagiographic materials on which they based their narratives.⁴²

An example is the late twelfth-century rendition of the story of Alexis. About twice as long as the eleventh-century prototype, the poem bears the significant title of "*Romance*" of *Saint Alexis*.⁴³ Romantic sentiments and vivid details replace the ascetic spirit of the original French text. Alexis' wife is given a much more prominent role, and so is the world of the flesh, as illustrated in the scene of the wedding night: entering the chamber to join his spouse, Alexis "saw that she was comely, desirous, and beautiful" (l. 126). The *Romance* focuses on human emotions in a manner reminiscent of courtly romance, thus greatly reducing the importance of the salient motifs (such as flight from society and holy insensitivity) that characterize the earlier version.

The same process appears in stories that celebrate holy heroines, as is the case of the various twelfth- and thirteenth-century versions inspired by the legend of Mary the Egyptian, a harlot transformed into a saint. While the twelfth-century *Life* written by Adgar⁴⁴ is a consciously devotional abridgement that stresses the role of the Virgin Mary in the heroine's conversion and sanctification, the anonymous author of *Mary A*, one of the two surviving poems composed in the thirteenth century, amplifies the basic story line following the rules of romance. These amplifications focus, among others, on the beauty of the seductress, on her sinful existence before her conversion, and on the episode that describes the manner in which a lion undertakes to dig her grave. None of these episodes is new within the legendary tradition of Mary the Egyptian. What is innovative, and in the manner of romance, is the way the poet of *Mary A* develops the sections of the story that are the least significant with regard to its devotional message. For example, the lengthy description of Mary's sex life prior to her conversion, a description which is meant to warn the public against the evil of the flesh, ends by stressing the world of the flesh in a manner that unwittingly echoes, rather than questions, the love lyric.⁴⁵ In contrast to the didactic conciseness of *Mary II*, the thirteenth-century *Mary A* attests to the influence exerted by the art of romance on the writing of Saints' Lives.

We should not conclude, however, that all thirteenth-century hagiographers endeavored to increase the imaginary aspects inherent in their subject matter at the expense of devotional authenticity; nor should we assume that twelfth-century verse hagiography developed entirely apart

from courtly romance, witness the above-mentioned *Romance of Saint Alexis*. Another emblematic example is the legend of Mary the Egyptian. Seen against *Mary II*, Adgar's didactic poem, *Mary I*, another twelfth-century rendition of the story,⁴⁶ displays many of the fictional and anecdotal amplifications that characterize the thirteenth-century *Mary A*. By contrast, Rutebeuf's thirteenth-century adaptation of the story (*Mary B*, the version translated in this Anthology) shows a concern for truth that anticipates the efforts of prose hagiographers to write reliable accounts.⁴⁷ The poet minimizes, for example, the episode of Mary's lascivious youth, while proclaiming his desire to tell a true story exempt from superfluous embellishments. This attempt to emphasize the exemplary value of Mary's conversion differentiates Rutebeuf's work from either *Mary I* or *Mary A*. Yet Rutebeuf fails to produce an innovative portrayal of female sanctity, thus reflecting, as we shall see in a later chapter, the prevalent view on woman's imperfect nature.⁴⁸

A consequence of the evolution of vernacular hagiography as the genre came to imitate the language and manner of courtly literature is the emergence of "hagiographic romance," a term which denotes the hybrid character of thirteenth-century verse Saints' Lives such as those contained in this Anthology.⁴⁹ The poets' attempts to "please" their public by composing devotional romances that proved to be both entertaining and instructive often led to awkward auctorial justifications. An example, in the *Life of Saint Paula*, is the author's own description of his poem as a "romance," but a romance which he wrote "To serve as mirror and example, / And not for entertainment" (ll. 1210–22). Even more ambivalent is the poet's assessment of his enterprise in the *Life of Saint Euphrosina* (ll. 1262–71). By telling his audience that he based his narrative on a source "Simply recounted by some ancient clerics," he implies, on the one hand, that his adaptation represents an improvement. On the other hand, he then proceeds to distinguish his poem, a "humble work," from current compositional practices: "I did not write it in the high style of courtesy."⁵⁰ Our poet's use of the alexandrine line, which was, along with the decasyllabic line, a favorite meter in the epic tradition, indicates his determination to distance his work from secular fiction. Yet the claim that his is a strictly devotional composition is at the same time undermined by the highly fictional character of his story. Despite their efforts to hide their debts to twelfth-century romance in terms of style and tone, thirteenth-century verse hagiographers nonetheless consistently turned to secular fiction as a mode of literary composition that could help sustain both the prestige of

hagiographic writing and the hearers' interest in this particular medium of religious instruction.

Works that commemorated holy heroines, including the poems of our Anthology, lent themselves to amplification even more suggestive of the courtly tradition, as contained in the scenes that describe the heroine's encounter with male tormentors, the type of language used by her suitors or followers, and the type of relationship she entertains with the Deity.⁵¹ Female Saints' Lives of the vernacular verse production in the main stress the exemplary character of their protagonists' achievement in terms of an exceptional, and virtually inimitable, ability to overcome woman's innate propensity to sin in the flesh. For example, the three heroines exalted in the twelfth-century verse production have in common a superlative beauty, a physical trait that propels each of them to play the role of a seductress. In the case of Catherine and Margaret, two admirable martyrs, this role is imposed rather than chosen. While the poets' goal is to glorify the heroines' merit in enduring the lust of their pagan tormentors, they never amplify the spiritual import of these ordeals. These two depictions of female sanctity do not essentially differ from that of Eulalia, since the story line similarly focuses on fleshly appearance as the reason that the heroine occupies the center of the stage. Physical sufferings constitute the main, if not the sole, element that serves to prove their holiness. In the case of Mary the Egyptian, fasting and vigils cause the heroine to lose her beauty and, consequently, her asset as a desirable prostitute, thus allowing her henceforth to lead a virtuous life. Corporeality is, therefore, the single reference on the basis of which each of these heroines gains salvation for her soul. The thirteenth-century renditions of these three legends rewrite the basic story line in a manner that even more highly accentuates the role imparted to the flesh as the mode through which female sanctity becomes manifest. All the martyrs and hermits commemorated in our textual corpus share, in fact, the same exceptional beauty and deserve the attribute of sanctity to the extent that they preserve their corporeal integrity. The result is an emphasis on the protagonists' body that has no equivalent in male Saints' Lives. It is, therefore, in the concrete sense of the term that these heroines can be viewed as "embodiments" of perfection.

Not only do these vernacular adaptations rewrite the Latin hagiographic tradition by reducing the spiritual character of female sanctity, they also represent a significant selection of hagiographic materials. Indeed, the surviving textual corpus shows a remarkable preference for legends whose story lines involve the disrobing, torturing, cross-dressing, or physical

transformations of mute and powerless heroines. A source of documentation that appears to have particularly attracted our poets is the *Vitae Patrum*, a collection of twenty-seven texts, some of which were translated from Greek into Latin before the sixth century. These Lives deal for the most part with the monks and ascetics of Egypt and Asia Minor in the fourth century. Flight from the world is a recurring motif in the *Vitae Patrum*,⁵² and, in that sense, these desert saints resemble the martyrs: suffering and self-denial are in both cases the essential attributes of sainthood. But the thrust of the *Vitae Patrum* often involves dangerous or exotic journeys during the course of which the saintly protagonist undergoes numerous adventures. Experts have recognized in these hagiographic tales the imprint of ancient Greek novels, evidence of their authors' attempts to emulate secular writing in order to provide "adherents of the new religion with suitably edifying yet exciting stories."⁵³ For our thirteenth-century hagiographers, who endeavored to borrow some of the themes and compositional practices of secular romance, the collection of the *Vitae Patrum* represented a textual source of considerable interest, given the abundance in these stories of such romantic motifs as threat of marriage, threat of rape, cross-dressing, imprisonment, and miraculous escapes.

The collection contains a number of stories that recount the protagonist's radical transformation from sin to virtue. Interestingly, most of the heroines portrayed in the *Vitae Patrum* belong to this type,⁵⁴ as if female sanctification could only be the result of conversion and, consequently, as if innate perfection were an exclusively masculine virtue. In these narratives, revelation of female sanctity occurs only after death, as illustrated in the *Life of Mary the Egyptian* and *Thais*, whose stories inspired two of our thirteenth-century poets. But posthumous revelation does not serve to confirm the spiritual value of the protagonist's earthly existence. In contrast to Alexis, for example, both Mary and Thais achieve public recognition solely to the extent that they were forced to forsake the pleasures of the flesh. And it is only through the intervention of male mentors (the monk Paphnutius in *Thais*, Zozimas in *Mary*) that their achievement becomes known. No less remarkable is the way revelation of female virtue is also a posthumous occurrence in the case of flawless and innocent heroines, such as Euphrosina and Marina, two other heroines of the *Vitae Patrum* also commemorated in thirteenth-century French hagiography. Whether innate saints or repentant sinners, these women achieve the status of sainthood when they enter Heaven rather than during their lifetimes. In contrast to male holy hermits, who are, in Elliott's terms, "liminal heros,"⁵⁵ the eremitic women

commemorated in our textual corpus are “marginal” figures since, unlike many of their male counterparts, they never return to society and therefore never act as spiritual guides and initiators.

In addition to martyrs and hermits, our textual corpus also commemorates a third type of female sanctity: the married women. This particular type, which does not figure in the extant twelfth-century hagiographic production, should in principle promote a different portrayal of perfection, one in which the preservation of corporeal integrity would no longer play an essential role, henceforth allowing for a spiritual (rather than strictly physical) embodiment of virtue. Two Lives in this Anthology—*Elizabeth of Hungary* and *Paula*—deserve, in that sense, particular attention. Leaving aside, for the time being, the case of Elizabeth, the only contemporary saint celebrated in the surviving thirteenth-century textual corpus,⁵⁶ we note that the *Life of Saint Paula* is preserved in a single manuscript, a sign that married women were probably not as popular as unmarried heroines.⁵⁷ The author of Paula nonetheless stresses the exemplary value of his heroine, noting that “*she* who looks in [this mirror] carefully / Will avoid daily such sins / As folly, pride, and meanness” (ll. 81–83). Compared to our mostly fictional heroines, Paula’s salient character is in being, like Elizabeth of Hungary, a historical figure. A married woman and the mother of five children, she led a devout life under the guidance of Jerome, an eminent fifth-century theologian and Paula’s first biographer. The French rendition adapts its Latin source in conformity with the traditional motif of holy insensitivity. The episode that describes Paula’s departure for the Holy Land is emblematic. While Jerome’s account notes the saint’s emotional pain at leaving her children, thus exalting the internal merit of her action, the French poet contrarily accentuates Paula’s maternal indifference: “The children remain on the shore. / The son outstretches his arms and cries. [...] But the mother does not listen” (ll. 292–97). In the French rendition, the demonstration that she is a saintly woman does not rely on spiritual arguments; rather, it is grounded in corporeality, as manifested by our poet’s insistence on the physical manifestations of Paula’s holiness. Evidence of the heroine’s virtuous disposition is her outstanding ability to endure material discomfort: “She did not resort to the comfort of a bed, / Whatever her state of health, / But lay on the bare ground, / Using only a sackcloth” (ll. 564–67). The austerity of Paula’s mode of life causes her to fall ill; but she “refused, whatever was said to her / To eat meat and to drink wine, / Even though her condition could lead to dropsy” (ll. 899–901).

The corporeal character of female sanctity is not, however, a trait

exclusive to thirteenth-century hagiographic romance. Many Latin and vernacular accounts dating from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century similarly stress the importance of the body as a woman's means of expressing her relationship with God. A typical example is provided in the Franco-provençal *Life of Saint Beatrice of Ornacieux* (†1303) composed by Margaret of Oingt, a Carthusian mystic who died in 1310. Margaret recounts an episode during which Beatrice, after taking communion, felt the Host "begin to grow until her mouth was completely filled by it. [. . .] She tasted flesh and blood."⁵⁸ Like Beatrice, many religious women in the Middle Ages had visions that featured Eucharistic imagery suggestive of a sensorial experience. While men's visions, more inclined to an objective form of mysticism, focused on the Consecration and emphasized seeing, women's mystical experiences were linked with intense devotion to the Eucharist and frequently involved sensorial perceptions such as tasting and eating. Eucharistic mysticism, a specialty of visionary women, allowed them to assume a priestly function that was closed to them in real life.⁵⁹ Sensorial perceptions served as catalysts for these mystics' empathetic identification with Christ, an identification that they often expressed in terms of spiritual marriage. An example is the prayer, cited by Margaret of Oingt, that Beatrice addresses to the Virgin Mary, in which she expresses her devotion to "your dear Son, my true Lord God and spouse."⁶⁰ Not only were Eucharistic visions a demonstration of women's unique ability to experience the felt presence of the divine, they also empowered religious women such as Margaret of Oingt, herself a visionary, to write unmediated accounts of their spiritual experience, thus acquiring auctorial authority.⁶¹ The particularly female emphasis on corporeality as illustrated in these late medieval accounts had, therefore, both a religious and textual significance.

Hagiographic romance offers a vastly different treatment of corporeality, in part because the poems translated in this Anthology are not unmediated accounts, but, rather, because they articulate a male perception of female sanctity. The fact, as indicated in the Introduction, that these Lives were authored by men contributed to a portrayal of perfection whose distinctive trait is lack of transcendence. In contrast to writings by saintly mystics and to Latin *Vitae* of female visionaries authored by male religious clerics, in our poems the body is not a catalyst for inward, mystical, or spiritual transports. The traditional motif of the saint as Bride of Christ, for instance, serves not as a figural but as a literal image that evokes the sensual language of courtly lyrics and romances, instead of the sacred union between God and the soul.⁶² God's final call, which, in the *Life of Saint Paula*

("My friend, / My spouse, come toward the life": ll. 1110–11), concludes the saint's earthly existence, tends to humanize the Deity in a manner evocative of the lover exalted in courtly literature. The result is a presentation of Paula as object of desire: while sanctity requires that, on earth, she relentlessly subdue the world of the flesh in order to attain a form of physical integrity, her fate is, in Heaven, to offer her body and become, literally, Christ's spouse. Paula ends her life a virtually silent and invisible heroine, as illustrated at the moment of her agony when the poet remarks that she "said nothing more, but closed her eyes" (l. 1094). Yet, after death, her reward in Heaven is expressed in terms that are clearly corporeal. This paradoxical treatment of corporeality in relation to female perfection characterizes, in reality, our entire textual corpus, as is further explored in the following pages.

Notes

1. Illiteracy in the Middle Ages primarily meant ignorance of the Latin language and, consequently, the inability to read. An indication of the illiterate character of the hearers is provided in the prologue of our *Life of Saint Juliana*. In the poet's words, "Latin is difficult for you, / And this is why I am resorting to the French language. / You have not learned Latin, / But you understand the vernacular. / He who listens carefully to my story / Will save his soul" (ll. 35–40).

2. As shown by P. Brown (1982), the cult of the saints in Latin Christianity originated among the educated elite of both the laity and the clergy. As the cult spread in medieval Europe, however, devotion to the saints became both a learned and popular phenomenon: see R. and C. Brooke's *Popular Religion in the Middle Ages* (1984), Chapters 2 and 3.

3. To use Brian Stock's felicitous expression: see *Listening for the Text* (1990), 4.

4. This is also the goal of the author of our *Life of Saint Catherine of Alexandria*, who begins his narrative by invoking Jesus Christ, for whose love "one must put into writing / The accomplishments of His friends," since "Among those who have undertaken / To honor the saints, / No one could deny having reaped benefits" (ll. 1–6).

5. The Latin word *exemplum* has both concrete ("mirror") and abstract ("example") significance.

6. For example, in the opening lines of our *Juliana* (ll. 5–6; not included in the translated excerpts), the poet tells his audience that his story is "true" for he found it in a Latin "Passionary," that is, in a written document commemorating the ordeals, or Passions, suffered by the martyrs of early Christianity.

7. The "textualized" environment of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries indicates that, while literary texts continued to be transmitted orally, their authority

depended on their status as written language. On the passage of vernacular literature from a primarily oral to a primarily written culture, see W. J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982).

8. Line 30; not included in the translated excerpts.

9. Lines 1946–48; not included in the translated excerpts.

10. This particular version, *Catherine A*, is summarized in the Anthology. Versions identified in this book by a capital letter (e.g., *Catherine A*) were composed in the thirteenth century, while a number (e.g., *Mary I*) indicates a twelfth-century composition.

11. Not only romances, but also epics, were gradually rewritten in prose: see Franz H. Baüm, “Transformation of the Heroine: From Epic Heard to Epic Read” (1975, 23–40).

12. On the rise of private reading, see Paul Saenger, “Silent Reading: Its Impact on Lay Medieval Script and Society” (1980, 367–414).

13. The goal of prose vernacular hagiographers was to identify the most authentic Latin source, which they translated into straightforward prose. In their search for textual truth, they also abandoned the practice of amplification in favor of abridgment. On the emergence and characteristics of prose French Saints’ Lives in the late Middle Ages, see J. D. M. Ford (1931–1932), and P. F. Dembowski (1975).

14. The thirteenth-century hagiographic production, which numbers about one hundred and twenty poems, is quantitatively significant if we compare it to the number of poems written before and after. Time has preserved from the twelfth century a total of twenty-six poems celebrating twenty-one saints, if one takes into account all alternate versions of the same legend. Thirty-seven surviving poems date from the fourteenth century, and twenty poems from the fifteenth century.

15. On the notion of greatness in medieval culture, see G. B. Ladner (1964).

16. See the English translation of Carl J. Odenkirchen (1978), whose introduction also contains important information on the Syrian, Greek, and Latin versions of the Alexis legend. Citations of the Old French poem in this section refer to Odenkirchen’s translation.

17. *Acta Sanctorum, Julii*, vol. IV.

18. Karl D. Uitti examines the stylistic modifications that distinguish the Old French poem from the tenth-century *Vita* in *Story, Myth, and Celebration in Old French Narrative Poetry, 1050–1200* (1973, 42–57). Other recent analyses of the poem include two articles by U. Mölk (1978), who examines the diffusion of the cult of Saint Alexis in eleventh- and twelfth-century France; E. B. Vitz’s exploration of Alexis’ quest for the “sacred subject” (1978); and an article by J. Rychner (1980), who investigates the epic elements of the poem. For more information on scholarly approaches to the legend of Saint Alexis, see Christopher Storey’s annotated bibliography (1987).

19. On the motif of holy insensitivity in vernacular Saints’ Lives, see J.-P. Perrot (1978).

20. The length of the poem varies slightly according to the manuscripts that preserve it. On the significance of these differences, see Donald L. Maddox (1973).

21. On the numerical symbolism in the *Life of Saint Alexis*, see W. Bulatkin (1959).
22. The last clause of the quote is a direct echo of the Gospel according to Luke, 23:34. On the biblical sources of *Alexis*, see G. Mermier (1978–1979).
23. On the role of language in *Alexis* as an element distancing the sacred and the secular, see B. Cazelles (1989), 13–18.
24. B. Stock (1990), 24–28.
25. These charitable acts were known as the “Works of Mercy”: see M.-H. Vicaire (1978), 21–44.
26. A translation of the *Sequence* can be found in the first Appendix.
27. Accounts that commemorate the martyrs’ deeds (acta) are known as “Passions,” while “Lives” generally refer to stories dealing with non-martyr saints.
28. In the Latin tradition, narratives that commemorate the martyrs of early Christianity usually focus on the “diametric” tension that opposes saints and pagan persecutors, in contrast to accounts that commemorate non-martyr saints, wherein the structure reflects the protagonists’ “gradational” progress on the road to perfection. See C. F. Altman (1975), 1. On the process of diametric tension in Old French Passions, see T. M. Hyun (1983).
29. See A. G. Elliott (1987), 41. Elliott’s work provides a clear and informative analysis of the characteristics of Latin hagiography during the early Middle Ages.
30. For a comparative analysis of the Old French renditions of the Alexis story, see J. Rychner (“Les formes,” 1980, 383–89); and C. E. Stebbins (1978, 379–403), who also edited the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century versions of the legend (1974).
31. For an analysis of *Jehan Paulus*, see B. Cazelles, *Le corps de sainteté* (1982).
32. One is our ninth-century *Sequence of Saint Eulalia*; the other four date from the twelfth century. For a complete survey of the Old French hagiographic production in the twelfth century, see P. A. Johnson and B. Cazelles, *Le vain siècle guerpir. A Literary Approach to Sainthood Through Old French Hagiography of the Twelfth Century* (1979).
33. Thirteen in the fourteenth century, and three in the fifteenth century.
34. This poem, *Margaret G*, is summarized in the Anthology. Two other popular poems are those of Saint Thais (Thais C, one of three alternate versions, which is contained in more than thirty manuscripts) and the only extant version of the *Life of Saint Juliana* (seven manuscripts).
35. In contrast to the single extant poem composed in honor of this saint in the twelfth century.
36. For a description of these three twelfth-century poems, see P. A. Johnson and B. Cazelles (1979), 218–23; 271–76; and 277–83.
37. For example, Catherine and Margaret are the two saints who will inspire Joan of Arc to enter the political scene in the first decades of the fifteenth century.
38. On intertextuality as a fundamental compositional practice in courtly romance, see M. T. Bruckner (1987).

39. As illustrated by Chrétien de Troyes's romance, *Guillaume d'Angleterre*, which combines hagiographic and novelistic elements.

40. P. Dembowski (1975), 120. On the structural and thematic analogies between hagiographic and secular romance, see M. Hurley (1975). Another interesting example of the interaction between hagiography and romance is the *Lai de Désiré*, a thirteenth-century courtly novella in which hagiographic motifs are given a secular significance: see P. Verhuyck (1986).

41. Certain twelfth-century writers, such as Wace (whose work includes an Arthurian romance, the *Brut*, and two saint's lives, *Nicholas* and *Margaret*) played an important role in the ennobling of secular literature. See Johnson and Cazelles (1979), 271-76 and 284-90.

42. As noted by E. Vinaver when he postulates that "most Saints' Lives seem to have developed along the same lines as the romances" (1971, 111).

43. The *Romance of Saint Alexis* was edited by G. Paris and L. Pannier in 1872.

44. This twelfth-century Life (*Mary II*) is summarized in P. A. Johnson and B. Cazelles (1979), 282-83.

45. The poet's use of the motif of the lion, a frequent motif in Latin hagiography (see A. G. Elliott, 1987, 193-204), is equally counteractive. The animal evokes, first and foremost, other fabulous animals of romance, as in Chrétien's *Knight with the Lion* where the lion emblemizes ideal chivalry, more than it does the Christ-like figures of the hagiographic tradition.

46. See Johnson and Cazelles (1979), 277-81.

47. The fact that Rutebeuf was a lay, not a religious, cleric might have contributed to his awareness of the essentially didactic goal of hagiographic writing as opposed to secular writing. The majority of his works belong to that second category.

48. Hence that Mary is both the central protagonist and in a subordinate position vis-à-vis Zozimas, the monk who orchestrates her redemption and who makes her story known.

49. The "romanesque" aspects of verse hagiography entail a tendency to heighten the drama of events, to increase the emotional effect of the story, and to set the narrative in the social and cultural environment of feudal northern Europe in a manner consistent with the compositional practices of writers of romance.

50. In Latin and vernacular culture, a "high style" referred to learned, written language, as opposed to simple or spoken speech.

51. An example is provided in a particular rendition of the story of Mary the Egyptian, analyzed by Ellen Swanberg in "Oraisons and Liaisons: Romanesque Didacticism in *La vie de Sainte Marie l'Egyptienne*" (1982).

52. This quest for solitude is best exemplified, in the *Vitae Patrum*, by Simeon Stylites. The hero asks to be chained to a rock at the top of a mountain, and later sets himself up on a series of pillars where he spends the remainder of his life praying and fasting.

53. Z. Pavloskis, cited by Elliott (1987), 46.

54. See Benedicta Ward's recent analysis of repentant "harlots of the desert" such as Mary of Egypt, Pelagia, and Thais (1987).

55. The male hermits are “liminal” heroes in the sense that their experience in the wilderness usually concludes with their eventual return to society, wherefore they become active witnesses and preachers of the Christian faith: see Elliott (1987), 204–09.

56. An examination of the *Life of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary* by Rutebeuf is provided in Chapter 3 of this commentary.

57. In the Middle Ages, marriage was not conceived as the best means to achieve perfection, and the treatment of the saints’ marital relations remained problematic: see R. Kieckhefer (1984), 143.

58. See R. Blumenfeld-Kosinski’s translation (1990), 56. For other examples of Eucharistic devotion among female mystics, see R. Kieckhefer (1984), 170–72.

59. As suggested by C. W. Bynum in *Jesus as Mother* (1982), 170–272.

60. R. Blumenfeld-Kosinski’s translation (1990), 62. C. W. Bynum cites many other examples of loving contact between saintly women and Christ in *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* (1987).

61. For other examples of writings by visionary women, see E. A. Petroff, *Medieval Women’s Visionary Literature* (1986).

62. The motif of the Bride of Christ derives from the Song of Songs, a biblical text that exerted a far-reaching influence on medieval thought and literature. On the Song of Songs in the Middle Ages, see E. A. Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved* (1990), in particular, Chapter 7: “The Genre as Trope: The Song of Songs in the Vernacular.”

2. Female Sanctity: Trial by Disclosure

Beginning with the troubadours' love songs at the turn of the eleventh century, women became an essential topic of the vernacular literary production as it developed during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. This chapter proposes to explore the significance of women's prominence in twelfth-century secular romance and thirteenth-century hagiographic romance, with particular attention to visibility both as an essential component of the portrayal of female perfection and as the locus of a gender distinction regarding the functional role of greatness.

Three main arguments justify a comparison between the holy heroine of verse hagiography and the lady of the courtly tradition. The first is the fictional character of the portrayal of women in both types of literary compositions. Indeed, the heroines commemorated in this Anthology are of little or no factual authenticity.¹ Like the ladies exalted in courtly narratives, the saints celebrated in hagiographic romance are the product of a predominantly male discourse that elaborates an idealized representation of female greatness. The virtually unilateral perspective on women that characterizes vernacular literature during the period calls, therefore, for a demystifying reading of this textual tradition and, in particular, of the hagiographic representation of female excellence.

A second element of resemblance between the courtly and the holy heroine is the compositional practices that typically characterize the writing of hagiographic romance. In the textual corpus translated in this Anthology, the basic saintly story line revolves around the dramatic encounter between the heroine and a male protagonist, the result of which is an emphasis on the relationship between genders, as is essentially the case in courtly lyric and romance. While denial of the world is a basic feature of the medieval view of holiness, hagiographic romance nonetheless tends to develop a story line whose climactic episodes focus on the heroine's corporeal, rather than spiritual, value. At issue, then, is to what extent we can talk of "moral greatness" in reference to narratives that give priority to their heroines' fleshly appearance.

The third characteristic common to both the courtly lady and the holy heroine is the way visibility is, in fact, part and parcel of a manipulative representation of femaleness, one in which prominence induces loss of freedom and power, as opposed to the verbal and active features that account for the prominence of a typical male hero.

The following sections consider successively some of the most significant components of visibility as the motif functions in women Saints' Lives of hagiographic romance. Before examining the saints' narrative transformation into objects of public desire, as the result of a process of "revelation" that compels each of our heroines to suffer the ordeal of forced exposure, we need to envisage briefly the paradoxical role of visibility in the portrayal of a typical courtly lady. Assessment of the lady's prominence tends to inspire ambivalent feelings on the part of her male devotee, who finds himself both attracted and threatened by the seductive power she exerts on him. A similar ambivalence marks the hagiographic discourse to the extent that this discourse exalts virginity as a prerequisite for female salvation, but through narratives whose main story line puts the heroine's virginal status in constant jeopardy. Two paradigmatic examples, that of Agnes (a young and helpless martyr) and that of Catherine of Alexandria (a heroine traditionally known for her intellectual prowess), illustrate the negative consequences of prominence in the vernacular representation of female perfection. Becoming visible is, in effect, a sacrificial process in the course of which the heroine is transformed into a mute and passive victim.

In the Limelight: Becoming Visible

In the ideal world of courtly literature, ladies play a founding role in the blossoming of a polished and refined culture. This ideal role is intricately connected with the desire of the twelfth-century nobility to revise the traditionally military function of the feudal order and to promote a new image of aristocratic society as more interested in learning than in fighting. Courtly literature, a textual production sponsored by the great courts of France and England, responded to this desire by idealizing the mode of life of the nobility through songs and stories that celebrated its peaceful and cultural qualities. Hence the central role of women characters as proof that the noble courts were occupied with amorous rather than aggressive pursuits, and engaged in verbal debates rather than military combats.

The following remarks summarize in a necessarily schematic manner some of the techniques employed by secular authors in depicting their

heroines. Essentially, the lady depicted in the courtly tradition is granted prominence to the extent that she is the single source of inspiration for both the poet who celebrates her and for the chivalric hero who serves her. Poetic hyperbole is, consequently, a typical component of the portrayal of the courtly lady in love songs and romances. An example, in Chrétien de Troyes's *Lancelot*, is the reverential attitude that the hero manifests in the presence of Guinevere: he "bows before her and adores her / For he believes in her more than in the relic of any saint."² And when at the end of this encounter it is time for Lancelot to depart, "the pain of leaving her / Causes him to suffer the agony of martyrdom" (ll. 4690–91). This scene, which is emblematic of the interaction between hagiography and romance, illustrates how writers in the courtly tradition endeavored to sanctify their heroines and to exalt them as active participants in the refinement of self and society. In Chrétien's romance, Guinevere appears to be the single motivating force that inspires Lancelot to take the road to gallant and generous chivalry.

The exaltation of women in the courtly tradition suggests that noble women of the time could and did achieve cultural recognition. Indeed, a number of contemporary figures—such as Eleanor of Aquitaine, or her daughter Marie, to whom Chrétien de Troyes dedicated his *Lancelot*—contributed in important ways to the elaboration of a literary discourse in which women appear to play an essential part in the refinement of the feudal elite. Yet the significance of this discourse is, above all, that it projected an ideal, rather than a factual, view on the relationship between genders within the nobility. While it is true that landed ladies enjoyed considerable freedom during the first feudal age of the ninth and ten centuries, their autonomy diminished drastically in the following two centuries. The growing dominance of the Church clergy, combined with the development of patrimonial institutions concerning property and inheritance, constricted the influence of noble ladies, who were denied access both to knowledge (since education at the cathedral schools and universities was reserved for men) and to the exercise of power.³

There is, therefore, no question of an equivalence between fact and fiction. The exaltation of women in courtly literature is undoubtedly a phenomenon of high cultural interest. However, the significance of this phenomenon addresses, first and foremost, the manipulative aspect of a predominantly male discourse that endeavored to exalt women as a means of exalting, in fact, the merit of both the poets who praised them and the knights who fought for them.

An example of the narcissistic nature of the courtly quest is provided in

the above-mentioned love scene between Lancelot and Guinevere. In venerating the queen as one would a saint, Lancelot acknowledges her ascendancy as well as her role in formulating the tasks expected of a chivalric hero, but not without presenting himself as a “martyr” ready to obey her commands at any cost. In the relationship between lover and lady, the former suffers at the hands of the latter, whose authority has a clearly tyrannical dimension. Sanctity is reserved for the hero, while the lady’s power evokes that of the pagan tormentor portrayed in a typical martyr’s Passion. The resulting inequality between the two partners, a recurring theme in courtly literature, assigns to the lady a dominant and domineering position. The power of the lady in courtly romance is, therefore, not altogether positive, since it seems to lend itself to arbitrary decisions over the fate of the male devotee. Courtly lyrics, too, articulate an ambivalent assessment of women in love songs that invent a lady Judge whose verdict will be praised if benevolent, but blamed when she rejects the pleas of the lover-poet.⁴

Not only is the lady’s “power” ambiguous, but it is often given quite a limited role. Despite the authors’ claims that the lady determines the artistic or personal excellence of her male devotee and is, on that account, granted a conspicuous position, she in fact disappears in the course of the courtly text. Guinevere in Chrétien’s *Yvain* (circa 1177–1181) is a case in point. The opening scene of the romance leads the audience to believe that the queen is an essential protagonist, one whose verdict decides the merit of the knights of the Round Table as storytellers rather than as martial champions. The result is, to all appearances, that words are valued over deeds. The queen’s court becomes the most significant cultural landscape, as opposed to the forests and open fields where knightly exploits traditionally take place. Knightly deeds, which belong to the masculine realm, appear here to occupy a secondary position in relation to the lady’s verbal expertise. In the fictional representation of social order, female protagonists are thus at the forefront, since the knights’ course of action originates and supposedly ends in their “courtroom.”

Yet, if Guinevere is the central force that sets Yvain’s quest in motion, the fact remains that the hero evolves outside her court and does not seek her verdict to verify his own worth. The opening scene of Chrétien’s romance has, indeed, no lasting effect on the unfolding of Yvain’s story, and Guinevere’s cultural competence, as well as the stage of her courtroom, is henceforth marginalized. From that point on, Arthur himself assumes leadership, and it is under his jurisdiction that Yvain finally proves himself a worthy knight.

Even these few literary examples show the existence of a discrepancy between, on the one hand, the lady's high visibility and, on the other, her diminishing importance in the course of the narrative. The female characters of courtly literature share little or none of the verbal or active power that determines the success of the quest for excellence. The lady sung by the poet-lovers remains silent.⁵ As for the heroines of romance, they evolve either within the walls of a single castle, like Laudine in Chrétien's *Yvain*, or within the confines of a male kingdom, like Guinevere, who remains imprisoned in an alien court during the major part of *Lancelot*. The idealization of the heroine in courtly literature is, in effect, subordinate to that of the hero: the lady is, above all, the means that helps the poet or the knight to attain public fame. The central position that she may occupy at the opening of the narrative is only a temporary stage, and she often disappears from the story.

In contrast to the courtly tradition, vernacular hagiography should, in principle, provide a widely different representation of excellence, since the saints do not seek fame in this world but bliss in the next. The portrayal of sanctity should not differ according to gender, since the role of the saints, whether male or female, is to serve as spiritual guides. It seems that the prominence attained by the martyr, for example, provides the holy protagonist with an opportunity to prove his or her verbal superiority over a pagan opponent. In contrast to the courtly lady, whose cultural "power" is both inconsequential and temporary, the female martyr should, therefore, be endowed with a gift of eloquence enabling her to contribute to the welfare of society, both from within and outside the narrative. However, an examination of the motif of visibility as it functions in the textual corpus translated in this Anthology reveals that, while the holy heroine is not ascribed the same tyrannical role as the courtly lady but on the contrary is herself a defenseless victim, her fate is similarly to be marginalized and set at a distance from the sphere of cultural activities. Virginity, an essential motif in the medieval discourse on female sanctity, leads, in hagiographic romance, to a treatment of women that precludes the depiction of strong and active characters.

Virginity Revealed

Virginity plays a fundamental role in the portrayal of the saints celebrated in our textual corpus. Indeed, all the heroines of the Passions that figure among the Lives translated in this Anthology are virgin martyrs, virginity

being the first attribute listed in the presentation of these saintly protagonists.⁶ It is because these heroines prefer to endure martyrdom than to lose their virginal condition that they achieve the status of sainthood.

The exaltation of virginal martyrs in verse hagiography is consistent with the traditional view of the Church on virginity as the hallmark of female perfection and on *integritas*, or corporeal purity, as the only means for women to transcend their nature.⁷ In that context, saintly women are exemplary exceptions inasmuch as their achievement contradicts the law of nature, a law that dictates a conventional perception of the female as an imperfect, incomplete, and defective version of the male—hence the typical description by the medieval Church of woman as the source of all evil,⁸ a door to Satan,⁹ and the gender of inferior intelligence.¹⁰

At the origin of this gender distinction was an Aristotelian understanding of the physical universe, which Greek as well as medieval science defined as composed of form and matter. While man provides the life-giving principle of form, woman is associated with a chaotic and formless matter. Medieval theology, which in the main shared with Greek philosophers and physicians the same hierarchical perspective and similarly insisted on the natural inferiority of women, supported this scientific principle with moral arguments. For example, etymological explanations corroborate the contention that woman (*femina*) is of lesser faith (*fe-minus*) than man¹¹ and that as a mother (*mater*), she belongs to the material world (*materia*).¹² Her biological constitution being dominated by the wet and cold humors, she is predisposed to be lustful and disobedient.¹³ In short, woman is, by instinct and nature, more inclined to succumb to the sins of the flesh, whereas man, whose very name (*vir*) evokes physical (*vis*) and mental (*virtus*) strength and who possesses rational and logical abilities,¹⁴ evolves in the world of ideas. Such a view on women justifies the law of subservience according to which they should obey the dictates of men, their natural leaders since Adam, who precedes Eve in the *Genesis* story.

For woman to achieve perfection requires, therefore, that she overcome her natural tendency to succumb to the world of the flesh. This is the reason that medieval theology praised virginity as a specifically female virtue.¹⁵ Yet the patristic definition of virginity also tends to forestall any possibility of representation, thus calling into question the entire hagiographic discourse. Inspired by a deep distrust of the body, a number of Church Fathers posited that, in order to be, purity should neither be seen nor described. In their view, a virgin ceases to be a virgin when she becomes the object of sensual love (Cyprian; third century); when she endures unchaste

gazing (John Chrysostom; fourth century); and when she is submitted to the adultery of the eyes (Novatian; third century). Tertullian goes even further when he declares that “every public exposure of a virgin is [to her] a suffering of rape.”¹⁶

The hagiographic portrayal of female *integritas*, which glorifies the merit of denying the flesh, clearly contradicts the principle according to which virginity is not to be seen. While verse Lives seek to educate their audience as to the value of physical intactness,¹⁷ they also re-enact the drama that forced Eulalia, for example, to be “brought before” the pagan prefect and exposed in public. Since virginity is not supposed to be portrayed and since female perfection involves a denial of the flesh, the hagiographic discourse implicitly defiles the very virtue it attempts to praise.¹⁸

Nonetheless, that the Church tolerated the writing and reciting of Saints’ Lives is a fact proven by the popularity of the genre. The goal of verse hagiographers, particularly during the thirteenth century, was to captivate the attention of their audience and to turn them away from the pleasures of secular fiction. To this end, they endeavored to prove that their holy heroines embodied a type of perfection superior to that exalted in the portrayal of the courtly lady.

Accordingly, the saintly characters commemorated in this Anthology are not, like their secular counterparts, mere decorative items attesting to the refinement of an aristocratic court. On the contrary, their greatness presumably consists in refusing to adopt the ornamental mode that accounts for the visibility of the courtly lady. Since woman is by nature a seducer and therefore inclined to pay undue attention to her appearance, the road to virtue requires that she temper her taste for the superfluous, for fear of becoming an object of desire. In the case of a saint, virtue takes a superlative form, as the heroine achieves holiness by rejecting any and all of the artifices associated with female vanity. Her mode of perfection stands in direct opposition to the aesthetics of femininity. While the courtly lady and the venal woman both evolve in the realm of matter, the holy heroine evolves in the realm of the spirit.

Thus, in principle at least, the portrayal of female perfection does not have an aesthetic but an ethical dimension. Avoiding the traps of femininity is what enables the heroine to occupy herself with spiritual rather than material concerns. She emulates man’s natural disposition to evolve in the world of ideas because she is able to transcend her own nature and to forsake her identity as a woman—in short, because she succeeds in becoming like a man. The road to sanctity begins with this initial denial of the

flesh, a denial which distances the heroine from the sphere of corporeality. Indifferent to her own appearance, eager not to provoke unchaste gazing, the female saint seeks to become invisible.

Yet, as we saw above, this quest for anonymity is counteracted by the hagiographic commemoration. In giving prominence to the heroes and heroines of Christianity, the writing of Saints' Lives runs counter to the virtues of humility and self-denial that typically characterize holiness. The end, to edify the audience, may justify the hagiographic discourse, but not without "giving flesh" to an achievement that entails, first and foremost, a denial of the flesh. Verse hagiography is, in that respect, a particularly contradictory discourse since it gives prominence to the corporeal embodiment of the saintly protagonist.

Indeed, the verse hagiographic production imparts to its heroes and heroines distinctions that give priority to the terrestrial rather than the spiritual realm: it appears that, to be a saint, one must be born noble, handsome, courteous, wise, and devout—and generally in that order. Social status is probably the most distinctive feature of the saintly portrayals that figure in this Anthology,¹⁹ including the women martyrs, who are all given a noble origin. Their aristocratic background functions as a narrative device that provokes the first encounter between them and their tormentors. One typical example is the *Life of Saint Faith*, which narrates how Dacian, the pagan ruler, first notices the heroine because of her aristocratic distinction. Beauty is another typical characteristic of the holy heroes and heroines of vernacular hagiography, and an essential element in the unfolding of their story. Such is the case of Alexis, whose gradual transformation from a noble and handsome young Roman into a dark-skinned hermit serves as a demonstration that the hero has succeeded in distancing himself from the temporal world and in renouncing the world of the flesh.

But beauty plays a remarkably different role in the portrayal of the saintly heroine, for this particular motif, rather than demonstrating her ability to escape the temporal world, in fact hinders her spiritual progress. In the biographical portion of the narrative, beauty and nobility combine to induce her transformation into an object of desire. The physical and social distinctions that characterize all the heroines commemorated in hagiographic romance serve to stress their vulnerability, since these very qualities attract the attention of the surrounding community, thereby contradicting their desire to avoid unchaste gazes. These saintly maidens seek, in principle, to remain invisible; yet the logic of the narrative goes counter to this aspiration, and their ordeal can be best described as a process of forced visibility.

This process is eloquently illustrated in the vernacular Passions of female martyrs who, for their pagan tormentors, are all the more noticeable and desirable because they are noble maidens. From the martyrs' perspective, however, virginity is an absolute value.²⁰ This contradictory view is an integral part of the tension that characterizes the Passions of female martyrs. Agnes is a case in point. All the textual and iconographic representations of her legend tend to insist on two dramatic occurrences: the miraculous growing of her hair, and the divine mantle that suddenly covers her as she enters the bordello.²¹ These two scenes, which serve to exalt Agnes' heroic determination to remain a virgin, are the narrative climax of the rendition translated in this Anthology.

In adapting the basic story line of the legend, however, the French poet uses these traditional episodes in a manner that reduces the heroine's autonomy as subject—while amplifying her function as object of desire. The resulting portrayal stresses less the saint's moral worth than the maiden's value within the economics of desire; hence the emphasis on virginity and the dramatic role of such motifs as public unveiling, danger of rape, and threat of prostitution. Agnes' vulnerability increases as the young and beautiful maiden is exposed to a gradually larger number of onlookers. At first, a single mode of voyeurism is at play, as Agnes endures the unchaste gazing of the tyrant's son. This mode turns pluralistic when additional characters (the prefect's servants) enter the stage. Then, the scenes of trials and tortures, set in public places such as the bordello, induce the presence of an even wider crowd. Finally, all the people of Rome, pagan priests included, are invited to the spectacle of her tortures at the stake. As Agnes' experience of space diminishes, the quantity of onlookers expands, signaling that her ordeal is proportional to her increasing visibility. The greater the number of spectators, the more melodramatic the theatrics of female exposure.

Voyeurism entails that the victim be seen without her knowledge or consent. It is the latter condition that predominates in the story of Agnes, an indication that her tormentor has sadistic impulses. The pagan prefect, who is apparently acting for the benefit of his son, is, in reality, the motivating force in the unfolding of Agnes' drama. He covets her less as an individual than as an object whose value resides in its scarcity. On his command, the heroine is exposed in full view of the crowd, both to display her worth and to keep this prized object out of reach. The prefect takes pleasure in exhibiting his investment, in increasing its value on the public market, and in appraising the future dividends that he alone, as the recognized ruler, is entitled to consume. In his case, the pursuit counts as much as, or more than, the capture.

Agnes is not duped by the ploys of erotic suspension, but she is deprived of any means to protect herself from unchaste gazing. Hence her plea to God:

She is now without clothes,
And, seeing herself naked,
Fair Agnes feels anguish and shame:
“God,” she says, “come to my aid!”
(*Agnes*, ll. 341–44)

The final line of the above quotation adds *in extremis* a religious dimension to her plight. Yet Agnes’ modesty is less a virtue than a personal asset that is threatened as much as it is publicized. As public desire increases, so does the prestige of the tyrant. That the heroine’s virginity is at the same time threatened and protected agrees, therefore, with his plan. When he finally authorizes his subjects to touch his prized treasure, the tyrant in fact reaffirms his superiority as sole possessor. His is an authoritative discourse²² that distances him from the masses, since he alone knows the superior pleasure of erotic deferral.

The result is that Agnes ceases to be an individual while becoming a consumable product. This reification of the heroine occurs through an ordeal by disclosure that undergoes three stages, including the disrobing scene, the onlookers’ passive contemplation, and their transformation into participants. Each of these stages enables the tyrant to exert his control, first when he exposes the maiden in a proprietary manner, and then when he gives away his most precious possession. This apparently generous gesture is another political act that enables the tyrant to affirm his authority. At this point in the narrative, the power of the erotic and the power of politics constitute a single process of investment. Sexual release leads to the preservation of social order, a resolution that calls for the sacrifice of Agnes.

Exposure of the female martyr involves, therefore, an involuntary projection onto center stage. Revelation takes on a melodramatic meaning, all the more spectacular as it implicates the concrete disrobing of the heroine. It is highly significant that this particular ordeal is, in fact, endured by every one of the martyrs whose stories figure in this Anthology.²³ Invariably, the ordeal of female martyrs begins with a theatrical removal of the heroines’ clothing, a scene that has no equivalent in the Passions that commemorate male saints.

Trial by exposure is not, however, the exclusive characteristic of female martyrdom. In stories dealing with women hermits,²⁴ undressing is also a

key factor in the process of holy recognition. As for repentant hermits such as Mary the Egyptian (l. 791) and Thais (l. 298), their Lives, too, include an episode of undressing, when both heroines renounce the artifices of female seductiveness. Stripping and nakedness, two recurrent themes that appear (except for *Paula*) in every one of the Lives contained in this Anthology, create a uniform portrayal of female sanctity as anatomized through male perception. Martyrs, virgins, married heroines, innocent as well as repentant hermits all undergo the ordeal of disrobing; and each of them achieves holiness as a result of circumstances that involve voyeuristic incarnation.

The Stake and the Pedestal

Two privileged arenas for the staging of female visibility in hagiographic and secular works of twelfth- and thirteenth-century vernacular literature are the stake and the pedestal. Both motifs have a central role in the process of revelation through which the heroine's outstanding character becomes known. In courtly literature, this process refers to the transformation of the beloved lady into an admirable icon. An example, cited above, is Lancelot's reverential attitude before Guinevere. The hero's idealizing vision of Guinevere places her on a pedestal where she acquires an almost divine quality. But the sanctification of the heroine by his admirer is not altogether positive. First, the communication between the two protagonists, which is no longer verbal but visual, becomes unilateral: one loves, while the other is loved; one gazes at his beloved, who now seems both motionless and sightless. Lancelot's contemplation of his "saintly" lady thus produces distance, rather than communion. Second, the appearance of Guinevere the "saint" effects that of Lancelot the "martyr." In Chrétien de Troyes's subversive use of hagiographic motifs, the saintly Guinevere is not a source of bliss and redemption, even at the emotional level, but of suffering.

Suffering at the stake, a prevalent narrative motif in the Passions of the martyrs celebrated in our textual corpus, invokes, by contrast, quite a different assessment of female greatness. Most noteworthy is the distinction separating the two roles of saint and tormentor. Unlike a typical courtly lady such as Guinevere, whose "sanctity" produces tyrannical results, the heroines exalted in these Passions are saints because they are martyred by pagan persecutors. Ordeal at the stake is the turning point in the recognition of the protagonist's heroic virtue. While the courtly lady

often causes her lover to experience pain and separation, the martyr is, on the contrary, posthumously a source of cure and salvation for all her devotees.

Yet beyond the apparent narrative and didactic differences that distinguish both motifs, the stake and the pedestal also share a number of common characteristics, thus disclosing the presence of a functional resemblance between the lady celebrated in courtly literature and the female martyrs whose Passions figure in this Anthology. Whether taking place at the stake or on the pedestal, the process of revelation similarly results in the heroine's transformation into an object. In the predominantly male literary production of the period, the portrayal of female greatness in secular as well as hagiographic literature is thus grounded in reification. At issue is the reason that inspired courtly and hagiographic writers to grant visibility to their heroines in a way that reduces, rather than promotes, their role as active contributors to the cultural or spiritual welfare of society.

Guinevere in Chrétien's *Lancelot* is, in that sense, emblematic. At the moment when the hero's admiring gaze turns her into an admirable icon, the queen loses her capacity to act and react, while Lancelot assigns to himself the glorious role of "martyr." Since the transformation of lover and beloved into tormentor and martyr is the hero's fabrication as he seeks to idealize his own image of himself, the true "martyr" is, in fact, not Lancelot but Guinevere. In the courtly tradition, the invention of a cruel or unreachable lady has, therefore, a victimizing significance. That the beloved lady often disappears from the text, either because her court is marginalized (as is the case in Chrétien's *Yvain*) or because the poet's praise of her turns into contempt,²⁵ reveals that she is only a pretext whose function is, first and foremost, to confirm and idealize the merit of the lover-poet or of the chivalric hero. In the narcissistic context of courtly literature, the lover's exaltation of his lady does not indicate that she has power over him, but signals, rather, his desire to hold her at bay and to exert full control over their relationship. Through his admiring gaze, she becomes a presence without content.

The pagan tormentors who endeavor to subdue the martyrs celebrated in this Anthology employ a similar strategy. Like the pedestal of courtly literature, the stake of hagiographic romance is a locus where the heroine becomes both highly visible and deprived of any verbal or active power. This is most obviously the case of the Passions, like *Agnes*, *Faith*, and *Euphrosina*, whose protagonists are still very young and proportionally defenseless. Like the fictional Guinevere in Chrétien's *Lancelot*, these hero-

ines are the victims of their tormentors' admiring gaze. Since corporeal beauty is their main if not sole attribute, ordeal at the stake is, in their case, a voyeuristic spectacle in the course of which they, too, become a presence without content.

But the pantheon of female saints also includes characters endowed with exceptional mental or physical strength. Such qualities should, in principle, give rise to quite a different treatment of female visibility. The *Life of Catherine of Alexandria*, for example, which celebrates a heroine traditionally renowned for her philosophical expertise,²⁶ appears to promote a portrayal of perfection grounded in strength rather than in helplessness. In contrast to the story of Agnes, who is forced onto center stage, visibility is, in Catherine's case, the result of atypical and active behavior. Not only does she decide of her own free will to face pagan authority, she also "gets up at once" and "runs" to confront Marcus and his men (ll. 206–26). This gives her the opportunity to prove her intellectual power, as she proceeds to vanquish and convert fifty of the most eminent philosophers of Marcus' kingdom. As befits the patron saint of students and philosophers, Catherine succeeds in forcing the tyrant to admire her "talent and eloquence" (l. 341). Since Alexandria was a renowned center of learning in classical antiquity, Catherine's intellectual prowess is consistent with the reputation of the city where her story takes place.

Catherine's uncommon expertise, however, has dangerous proportions in the context of thirteenth-century northern Europe, given the widespread illiteracy (especially among women) that characterized the major portion of society. The understanding that verbal and logical power are not normally women's attributes is clear from the reaction the narrative assigns to Catherine's tormentor as he assesses her talent:

"I have a maiden, under guard,
Beautiful and young in age,
But so wise and learned
That she is superior to the best clerics."
(*Catherine*, ll. 408–11)

In conformity with the conventional gender distinction between the spirit and the flesh, the pagan prefect seems to call into question (the *but* at line 410) Catherine's intellect, and so do, at first, his fifty philosophers.²⁷ But the pagans' attitude changes as the heroine's power manifests itself tangibly. When God's wind swirls about the fragments of her wheel of torture, with the result that "Brains are split open / And four thousand pagans die"

(ll. 1527–28), Marcus denounces Catherine for having “bewitched” (l. 1732) his people. Divine revenge empowers the saint to emasculate her tormentor, since his people are afflicted in their brains (a virile attribute) and are thereby deprived, in the case of the fifty philosophers, of the very source of masculine authority. The shadow of witchcraft is looming. Indeed, just as power is at the center of the accusations made against the “strong” women martyrs (Catherine of Alexandria, Juliana, and Margaret of Antioch) celebrated in this Anthology, power is also the central argument that justified the prosecution and condemnation of women accused of sorcery during the late Middle Ages. The Passions of our textual corpus thus proves that it is not necessary to wait until the trial of Joan of Arc to see how “a male-dominated society” could “associate ‘unfeminine’ behavior with heresy and witchcraft,”²⁸ and how even the most banal kinds of female self-assertion could be interpreted as social defiance.²⁹

There is of course no question of a direct historical connection between, on the one hand, the “strong” female martyrs celebrated in this Anthology and, on the other, the usually poor, old, and solitary women accused of sorcery in the late Middle Ages. What justifies a comparison is the way accusation focuses, in both cases, on woman’s alleged “power.” In the context of a martyr’s Passion, the stake is the emblem of unlawful violence on the part of tyrants as they abuse their innocent victims. Thus, these hagiographic texts, which show how martyrs were accused on false grounds, articulate the viewpoint of the persecuted and denounce the accusers (the pagan tormentors) as being guilty of wrongdoing. From the tormentor’s perspective, however, ordeal at the stake is a just retribution for the protagonist’s civic disobedience when the martyrs refuse to recant, or when they show (as do Catherine, Juliana, and Margaret) uncommon strength, thereby endangering social order. By contrast, the documents that record episodes of witchhunting in the late Middle Ages present the viewpoint of the “persecutors,” that is, of the prosecutors who endeavored to punish, sometimes by burning at the stake, individuals accused of sorcery. Considering that sorcery, “the most important capital crime for women in early modern Europe,”³⁰ was viewed in terms of an organized diabolical conspiracy, burning at the stake constituted, in that context, a just punishment imposed on individuals who were thought to exert a very real and threatening power. Yet, beyond their apparent divergences, these two processes of accusation represent, in fact, a mishandling of justice. Whether a Christian martyr or an alleged heretic, the victim is, in each case, accused because of her abnormal “power”—hence the necessity to expose her publicly, thereby rendering her harmless. Female martyrs of the hagiogra-

phic tradition and sorceresses in the late Middle Ages can, in that sense, all be viewed as innocent targets of persecution. The "revelation" that takes place at the stake entails the unveiling, and dismantling, of the victim's atypical behavior. Thus, in Monter's words, "the sad truth is that, in women's 'real' social history, the pedestal is almost impossible to find, but the stake is everywhere" (p. 135).

If the stake is indeed "everywhere," this is because the pedestal of the courtly tradition is itself a locus of forced exposure wherein the effect is to increase the heroine's vulnerability. The martyr, the lady, and the sorceress as targets of a similarly victimizing treatment thus represent three comparable stereotypes. The stake and the pedestal, which are the stage of judgments rendered unilaterally by a male subject on a female object, play one and the same role in that the victims are unwilling participants in a trial where they stand accused. Viewed as an ennobling or as a dangerous force, female power is visually set apart and thus prevented from ever exerting any influential role in society. But both loci are also the setting of an extravagant assessment of female "power," since power does not, in reality, belong to the victims but to their accusers. The fact, for instance, that the victims of witchhunting were often isolated women, widows or spinsters, who could resort neither to the law (for want of economic power) nor to physical violence clearly points to the persecuting significance of their trials. Similarly, adulation of the lady in the monologues of courtly lyric implies a non-verbal, silent, and passive stance on the part of the addressee. And it appears that trial by disclosure also leads, in the case of the martyrs celebrated in this Anthology, to the silencing of the heroines, as illustrated, for example, in the *Life of Saint Faith*.

At first glance, it seems that the poem exalts the saint for her active role in inspiring similarly heroic behavior. Indeed, three male onlookers, first Capraise and then Primes and Felician (ll. 762–78), endeavor to follow her lead and declare their faith in public. However, the manner in which their heroism becomes manifest clearly sets those three characters apart from the protagonist of the poem. Unlike Faith, whose sanctification entails that she be *seen*, the male characters achieve the status of holiness to the extent that they are *heard*. In Capraise's case, the decision to disclose his Christian allegiance involves self-assertiveness: "He did not wish to hide any longer. / He now wanted to confront the sufferings / Endured by Saint Faith, God's friend" (ll. 593–95). Martyrdom is *confronted* by the male martyr, while *endured* on the part of Faith. Although not the protagonist of the story, Capraise soon finds himself in the limelight; and from then on Faith disappears into the shadow of her emulators (ll. 633–836). It is the three

male martyrs, and not Faith, who display a talent for eloquence, thus inducing the pagan ruler to feel “confused, vanquished, / Vilified, and dishonored” (ll. 791–92). Moreover, as long as Capraise remains silent, “no one [pays] any attention to him” (l. 629) and his arrival at the stake of torture passes unnoticed. In order to become visible, the hero must speak up—a verbal act that is conspicuously lacking in the making of the saintly heroine.

The case of Catherine of Alexandria is even more remarkable for, despite the philosophical competence granted her by tradition, the French poet rewrites this tradition in a way that reduces, or altogether obfuscates, the heroine’s “strong” qualities. One wonders, for example, about the poet’s intent when he describes the heroine’s physical and social characteristics (she is a noble and beautiful “young maiden,” l. 135) before introducing her emblematic intellectual features (ll. 145–56). The didactic aim is, perhaps, to stress the element of surprise. More probably, this sequence indicates the subordinate role of Catherine’s particular power within the unfolding of the drama. Her mental abilities play, in fact, only a minimal role. The narrative never demonstrates Catherine’s intellect, but only confirms it through miraculous demonstrations. She herself readily admits a distaste for studies (ll. 610–26), and, if this condemnation of secular knowledge is meant to prove the superiority of exegesis, nothing in the course of the celebrated debate even remotely suggests that Catherine has mastered theology. Her discourse closely resembles that of Agnes (ll. 273–76) or of Faith (ll. 341–46) when she proceeds to prove the falsity of pagan idols.³¹ Rather than verbal sophistication, her speech displays a simplistic verbosity whose effect is to eliminate the difference between the adolescent virgin martyrs and Catherine, their “virilized” counterpart.

Marcus’ reaction at the lengthy speeches Catherine addresses to him indicates that her main distinction resides, indeed, not in her intellect but in her physical appearance. As she is talking,

[Marcus] saw the brightness of her face,
A brightness he had never seen before.
Her face, her body and her eyes,
Were the objects of his gaze.
Looking at her closely,
He saw nothing in her appearance
That was deceiving or misleading,
For the maiden was beautiful indeed.

(*Catherine*, ll. 258–65)

Catherine's verbal gifts are supposedly dazzling. Yet her pagan tormentor is impressed exclusively by her anatomy, and so is the poet, who incites his thirteenth-century audience similarly to stare at Marcus' object of desire. At this point in the narrative, the motif of disrobing becomes fully operative, and Catherine's mental abilities cease to be mentioned. The saint's anatomy is, from then on, given a prominent role, which suggests an implicit incapacity on the part of the hagiographer to pay tribute to Catherine's intellectual autonomy. The resolution of the narrative prevents the heroine from being perceived as a "virago"³² since Catherine's eventual beheading puts an end to her power and to its threat of emasculation. Her death and celestial coronation are consistent with the logic of hagiography, as Catherine's power is henceforth to have a protective function. But this resolution also terminates Catherine's autonomous intellectual qualities, as if to suggest that these qualities are incompatible with contemporary social values.

Whether adolescents or viragos, the female martyrs of hagiographic romance undergo the same basic drama, a drama that pits a defenseless heroine against a powerful male protagonist. Within these narratives, space is manipulated in a way that focuses on this unequal confrontation, proving that, indeed, "the stake is everywhere." In the portrayal of the female heroines of hagiographic romance, trial by exposure results in their being simultaneously excluded by, and enclosed within, the circle of male power.

Notes

1. Only one contemporary figure, Elizabeth of Hungary, figures among the heroines celebrated in our textual corpus. The manner in which Rutebeuf, the author of this poem, endeavors to portray his heroine in conformity with the narrative conventions of vernacular hagiography tends, however, to reduce or eliminate Elizabeth's value as a paradigm for practiced, voluntary poverty in the context of thirteenth-century Europe. (Rutebeuf's fictional rewriting of Elizabeth's life is examined in Chapter 3.)

2. Lines 4652–53 of Chrétien's *Lancelot* (circa 1177–1181). See D. D. R. Owen's translation (1987), 247.

3. One significant example is Eleanor of Aquitaine, whose hostility to her first husband (Louis VII of France, to whom she was married between 1137 and 1152) and to her second husband (Henry II of England, who died in 1189) was "rooted in her belief that she did not have sufficient political power in the government of those kingdoms": J. A. McNamara and S. F. Wemple (1977), 113.

4. See B. Cazelles, "Mots à vendre, corps à prendre, et les troubadours d'Aquitaine" (1983); and "La rose et la violette" (1986).

5. A number of female poets (the “*trobairitz*” of southern France in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries) endeavored to propose their own perspective on love. In the main, however, the *trobairitz*’s poems express a desire to join in the quest for artistic excellence, the result of which is a tendency to “take over the troubadour model without the slightest verbal modification to accommodate the female speaker”: W. D. Paden (1979), 80. See also Paden’s book, *The Voice of the Trobairitz* (1989) and P. Dronke (1984), 97–106.

6. The ninth-century *Sequence of Saint Eulalia* presents its heroine as “a maiden” (l. 1), and so does our *Life of Saint Agnes*, which begins with the suggestive line that “Once upon a time in Rome, there was a maiden” (l. 33). References to the protagonists’ maidenhood in the verse hagiographic production indicate the importance—and corporeal significance—of virginity in the making of a typical female martyr.

7. Medieval views on the body varied widely across the centuries. The Christian ideal of sexual renunciation did not have the same meaning in the early eastern Church as in the Latin world, nor did the definition of women’s sexuality remain static. While women sometimes inspired somber views, that, for example, of Tertullian (circa 155–circa 220) who saw them as “the Devil’s gateway,” they were also recognized as valuable and active participants of the Christian community. (On the evolution of the concept of sexual renunciation for men and women in early Christianity, see P. Brown, *The Body and Society*, 1988). The fact remained, however, that in the main physical intactness as defined by the Church Fathers was both a prerequisite for women’s perfection and a sign that they had succeeded in transcending their nature. In Eusebius’ perspective (circa 265–circa 340), a consecrated virgin “was no longer a woman; she had become a ‘sacred vessel dedicated to the Lord’.” (Quoted by P. Brown, 1988, 260.)

8. *Caput malorum*: see N. Huyghebaert (1968), 349.

9. *Janua diaboli*: E. Power (1975), 160.

10. See Sh. Shahar (1983), 120.

11. E. W. Monter (1977), 129.

12. J. M. Ferrante (1975), 6.

13. P. S. Gold (1985), 72.

14. Shahar, (1983), 24.

15. The result is “a heavily disproportionate admiration for female virginity,” given that this insistence has no equivalence with respect to the concept and portrayal of masculine perfection: J. T. Schulenburg (1986), 31.

16. Quoted by R. H. Bloch (1990), 301.

17. The poet of the *Sequence of Saint Eulalia*, for instance, notes how his heroine “would rather endure tortures / Than lose her virginity” (ll. 16–17).

18. And so do many medieval theologians when they establish an equivalence between woman, language, and seductiveness. Tertullian compares authors who adorn their literary works with rhetorical ornamentation to women who sin against God by anointing their faces with cream, creating a beauty that is a natural “exciter of lust”: see his work, *The Apparel of Women* (1959), 131. Hence the paradoxes of a discourse in which “the danger of woman [. . .] is that of literature itself”: R. H. Bloch (1989), 20.

19. An example is Mary the Egyptian, who, according to Rutebeuf, was "the daughter of a count, / Of a king or of an emperor" (ll. 28–29). The author of the *Life of Saint Euphrosina* similarly emphasizes his heroine's noble lineage (l. 22).

20. The martyrs celebrated in this Anthology never explicitly profess a religious reason for their desire to preserve their corporeal integrity. Allusions to their posthumous status as "Brides of Christ" (examined below, in Chapter 3), instead of sacralizing the body, themselves contribute to a strictly fleshly depiction of female perfection. The result is a tendency to amplify the physical, rather than spiritual, significance of their virginal status.

21. See *Agnes A*, ll. 346 and 362. Added to the core of the legend over the course of the centuries, these two anecdotes are attempts to illustrate the etymological meanings of her name, Agnes, in reference to *agne* ("chaste," in Greek) and to *agnus* ("lamb," in Latin; a symbol of sweet innocence)

22. Witness, at line 354 and following, his order: "Take her to the bordello. [Let people] do with her whatever pleases them."

23. See *Agnes*, l. 339; *Barbara*, l. 257; *Catherine*, ll. 1002 and 1476; *Christina*, ll. 1486, 2483, and 3112; *Faith*, l. 385; *Juliana*, l. 194; and *Margaret*, l. 170.

24. See *Euphrosina*, l. 1185; and *Marina*, l. 1037.

25. The celebration of the beloved "lady" often leads to a condemnation of all "women," as illustrated in one of the songs composed by the troubadour Bernart de Ventadorn (late twelfth century): "I despair of women. No more will I trust them; and just as I used to defend them, now I shall denounce them. Since I see none aids me against her who destroys and confounds me, I fear and distrust all of them, for I know well that they are all alike." (*Canso* 43, ed. S. G. Nichols, 1962, 168.)

26. In the Latin collection of Saints' Lives composed by Jacobus de Voragine (thirteenth century), for example, the author eulogizes Catherine's mental abilities as her defining characteristic (*The Golden Legend*, 715–16), a view that is further reflected in the fact that the saint is often depicted in fifteenth-century paintings and statues in the process of reading a book: see L. Réau (1958), 3: 1, 262–72.

27. In their opinion, Catherine is "a mere child whose only talent / Is to mock people" (ll. 448–49).

28. McNamara and Wemple (1977), 115.

29. Casey (1976), 241.

30. Monter (1977), 133.

31. See ll. 318–25: "Since they have a human appearance, / Their eyes should see, / Their ears should hear, / Their mouths should talk, / Their hands should grasp and their feet move. / Otherwise, it is a proof / That those who honor these gods / Are indeed of little wisdom."

32. Virago is an epithet used in ecclesiastical discourse to characterize female strength as improper masculinization: see M.-Ch. Ponchelle (1973), 49.

3. Femininity Circumscribed

The medieval period shows a pronounced tendency to resort to spatial imagery when delimiting the topography of social order, and particularly when charting one's progress on the road to salvation.¹ Distance between the believer and God is expressed in terms of a vertical continuum whose two extremes, Hell and Paradise, give confinement an antithetical significance. Enclosure is in the first case a punishment, and in the second a state of celestial bliss. It is the latter state that the heroines of hagiographic romance constantly yearn for, all the more so as, on earth, they endure the ordeal of forced exposure.

Enclosure on earth has also a dual significance, since spatial restriction can either be an alienating experience—as in the case of the martyrs of early Christianity when they endured the ordeal of imprisonment—or a protection against the dangers of the world. The Latin *Life of Christina of Markyate*, which chronicles the real-life story of a noble woman in twelfth-century England (circa 1096–circa 1155), provides an illustration of the protective value of enclosure in relation to women's safety.² Fleeing the family home and the authority of both her parents and her spouse, Christina lived for over four years in the confined space of a dark cell, so terrified of being discovered that she was sometimes afraid to breathe.³ Yet voluntary enclosure also gave Christina the spiritual freedom that was denied her at home. In her case, the ability to lead a religious life appears to be in inverse proportion to the amount of space she occupies. Flight from marriage and voluntary confinement are thus two major aspects of Christina's *Life*, which evokes, in that respect, the *Life of Saint Alexis*. Christina herself appears to have recognized the resemblance between her own story and that of the hero of the eleventh-century French poem, since the earliest version of the *Life of Saint Alexis* forms part of a manuscript, the St. Albans Psalter, that may have been presented to Christina (circa 1123) when she had become the prioress of the nunnery at Markyate near the St. Albans abbey.⁴

As it functions in hagiographic romance, however, enclosure is an imposition rather than an option freely chosen by the heroine. Conse-

quently, forced enclosure and forced exposure participate in the same process of spatial manipulation, a process that centers equally on woman's mercantile worth. When prostitutes (like Thais) are enclosed in a cell and thus removed from circulation, or when an abusive father confines the heroine (Barbara, Christina) in a tower and keeps her from the view of potential pursuers, social exchange is similarly interrupted. But detention is not exclusive to saintly heroines. Many male martyrs⁵ undergo imprisonment before or between torture sessions. Male imprisonment, however, is never linked, as it is in the Passions of our textual corpus, with the phenomenon of sublimated sexual relations. By contrast, the narrowing of space experienced by the women martyrs and hermits of hagiographic romance serves to stress the intimate, and therefore dangerous, dimension of the encounter between heroines and tormentors. Temporary imprisonment, which represents another theatrical terrain of exposure, is a narrative device that amplifies the erotic elements inherent in these stories.

The Jail and the Cell

In Passions devoted to persecuted daughters (Christina and Barbara), enclosure is an ordeal imposed by incest-minded fathers who become tyrants out of sexual frustration. But innocent hermits, such as Marina and Euphrosina, also find themselves condemned to spend many years within the walls of a cell. The meaning of all these latter legends as they were first composed in the early Middle Ages is not that they recorded real female behavior⁶ but that they revealed how monastic fantasies attempted to "neutralize the threat of female temptation."⁷ And it is remarkable to see that, centuries later, thirteenth-century French hagiographic romance continued to celebrate female transvestism.

The authors of both *Marina* and *Euphrosina* exalt transvestism as an admirable accomplishment that empowers the heroine to protect her virginity. The goal is to show how the transformation of female into male allows the saint to become Christ-like. Yet cross-dressing is, in reality, not an option willingly chosen by these two heroines, but the result of external forces inducing loss of freedom. The two combined motifs of transvestism and false accusation underscore the status of these legends as the projections of male sexual fantasies. Erotic imagination "is brilliantly concealed by disguising the woman as a man and making her appear guilty of the very temptation to which the monks are most subject."⁸ As a consequence,

Marina's ordeal "assumes the aspects of a ritual sacrifice,"⁹ and although Anson is here referring to Euphrosina, it is indeed the story of Marina that best exposes the victimizing mechanism accounting for the sanctification of the female transvestites celebrated in our Anthology.

According to the author of the *Life of Saint Marina*, humility is the one exemplary achievement that qualifies Marina to be a saint (l. 1165). But the unfolding of the drama centers, in fact, on Marina's unjustified humiliation. The role played by her father is, in that respect, quite significant. After entering a monastic community, he decides that Marina is henceforth to assume a male identity and to adopt his new mode of life. The three virtues of humility, purity, and obedience that he now asks her to observe are an integral part of his personal plan: "[She] who lives humbly / Is protected from the Devil's power. / Thus, keep your heart pure, / Be patient with everyone, / Obey God's will, / And God will help you" (ll. 228–33). Marina's forced enclosure and transvestism are strategies that he concocts in response to *his* desire to combine monastic calling and paternal love. Her father's creation rather than God's, "Marin" is not a new identity, but the sign that Marina's individual identity has been sacrificed. The heroine's need for a provider is all the more imperative and, at her father's death, she can justly lament her isolation and helplessness (ll. 321–36).

To the law of filial obedience is added the rule of monastic obedience that places "Marin" under the direct order of the abbot. Since the transvestite is a creation of paternal desire, the heroine finds herself powerless on two counts when the abbot orders her to travel outside the monastery, thereby forcing her to become visible under the guise of her assumed persona (ll. 372–73). This journey outdoors provokes a sequence of ordeals in the course of which "Marin" is the target of a paternity suit on behalf of an innkeeper's daughter, is then "beaten and whipped" (l. 557) in full view of the brothers, and is thrown out of the monastery. Her silence when being charged with a monstrous "crime" (l. 580) is not a mark of self-denial, but the result of her father's order never to reveal her identity. The abbot declares "Marin" unnatural for having led "a debauched life" (l. 584), undesirable (hence his order to "go away at once," l. 585), and untouchable: "In the name of the faith I have in God, / You cannot stay here any longer, / For our brothers could be stained by your dissolute ways" (ll. 587–90). If the abbot fears that the heroine's mode of behavior might be contagious, this goes to prove that, in his view, nothing indeed distinguishes the accused and the accusing community. In other words, he believes in "Marin's" guilt because he is all too aware of the potential weakness of his monks.

The abbot condemns her to remain at the door of the abbey (ll. 670–92), deprived of any social support. At this threshold, a locus of punitive limbo, Marina is the object of public defamation. With little food to sustain herself, Marina is in fact put to death, but in such a way that the perpetrators of her “martyrdom” are not identified. A sacrificial text indeed, the narrative exalts the heroine to the extent that she is the target of groundless accusations as well as a scapegoat whose ordeal insures the preservation of order. In an aside to his audience, the author of *Marina* directly acknowledges that her story assumes “the aspects of a ritual sacrifice”:

“Lords, we who sin everyday
Should keep in mind this beautiful reply,
Admiring Marin’s humility
And willingness to pay
—Although it was not his debt—
And to be accused, without anyone to help or comfort him.”
(*Marina*, ll. 530–35)

On the one hand, the poet recognizes that Marina’s ordeal is not justified, because she is innocent of the crime in question; lust, then, is not women’s exclusive attribute, but also an element inherent in man’s nature. On the other hand, however, the author seems to agree with Marina’s father that cross-dressing and enclosure are the best means to insure woman’s salvation. Thus, Marina’s female nature provokes the usual misogynous discourse concerning women’s “weaknesses of the flesh” (ll. 215–45) and the necessity to keep feminine beauty behind closed doors (ll. 132–77).

The Passion-like aspect of this legend—whose heroine is, like the martyrs of early Christianity, the victim of undeserved torments—is not accidental. Literary history proves that the motif of transvestism initially developed around martyrs before inspiring a separate cycle of stories focusing on non-martyr saints.¹⁰ The author himself qualifies his heroine’s achievement in terms of heroic sanctity: “Lords, you who have heard / The lives of many saints, / You know how some saints had the virtue of patience, / How others showed true humility, / And how some suffered martyrdom. / But I know, or have read, of no saint / Ever to be found, / Who behaved so well [as did Marina]” (ll. 693–701). A major distinction, however, separates a typical Passion from narratives such as our *Marina* and *Euphrosina* that glorify the virtue of saintly transvestites. Whereas the martyr’s torments are imposed on the heroine by a pagan persecutor, in the case of Marina and Euphrosina these torments occur in a Christian context. The didactic intent is to exalt these heroines’ spiritual achievement. Yet the

profound significance of their stories is that, whether dressed, undressed, or cross-dressed, they are similarly and inexorably defenseless in the face of masculine desire.

Most noteworthy, in that sense, is the role of transvestism in the history of medieval Christianity. Holy transvestism was a uniquely female phenomenon that had no male counterpart, "not only because the male who cross-dressed lost status but because he was also associated with eroticism, or with witchcraft."¹¹ The Church accepted cross-dressing only in the context of woman's regeneration. Any other usages of transvestism (by all men, as well as by women when their resorting to male dressing was inspired by evil intents) were condemned as deviant and contrary to nature.¹² Hence the tendency to regard excessive feminization on the part of men, and masculinization on the part of women, as transgressions that equally endangered the welfare of society; hence also the tendency to fear the "power" of these transgressors and to assign to it a malefic origin.¹³

In the stories of our holy transvestites, cross-dressing supposedly enables them to escape the flesh and to lead a spiritual mode of life. Far from strengthening the heroines, however, transvestism compels them to suffer enclosure in a cell (Euphrosina) or to live on the margin of society (Marina). The *Life of Saint Marina* forcefully illustrates the way imposed transvestism, which is only a variation on the law of spatial restriction according to which women must be kept at a safe distance in order to protect men from sexual temptation, also causes her ritual sacrifice. The victimizing mechanism that confines "Marin" at a threshold, apart from the monastic as well as the lay community, transforms the transvestite into an unwilling martyr of collective violence. By contrast, the threshold has, in the case of male hermits such as Alexis, a radically different function: first, because it is the hero himself who chooses to live on the fringes of society; and second, because his mode of marginal existence (at the door of the Edessa church, or under the staircase of the family house) incites public admiration and serves to prove the holiness of the "man of God."¹⁴

In stories dealing with repentant hermits, a similar difference distinguishes the treatment of space as it delineates the hero or the heroine's progress on the road to perfection. An illustration of male imprisonment as a self-imposed experience is provided in the twelfth-century *Life of Saint Gregory*,¹⁵ the story of a repentant sinner that bears a strong resemblance to the Oedipus myth. Having unwittingly wed his own mother, himself the fruit of illicit love between brother and sister, Gregory chooses to expiate his sin through confinement in a barren surrounding. Spatial isolation means

that the hero takes himself out of sexual circulation and freely renounces the order of the flesh. In vernacular hagiography, self-assertiveness is a strictly male phenomenon that entails, in the story of Gregory, the hero's triumphant reinstatement into society and election as Pope. The legend of Theophilus, another famous repentant sinner in medieval lore,¹⁶ confirms the presence of a gender distinction in the treatment of sin by vernacular hagiographers. At the onset of the story, humility inspires Theophilus to resign from his function as bishop. But the hero comes to regret his decision and pledges allegiance to Satan in order to regain his former position of power. Pride is presented in this legend as the prime reason for the hero's downfall, thereby entailing that Theophilus acknowledge anew the value of humility. Interestingly, there exists no female equivalent comparable to Theophilus within the hagiographic tradition, most probably because pride tended to evoke a mental form of transgression and was, as such, not a vice commonly associated with women.

Two stories figuring in this Anthology, those of Thais and Mary the Egyptian, illustrate how, in the case of women sinners, transgression occurs in a carnal rather than mental context, and how humiliation, rather than humility, is the price they must pay in order to be saved. Undue concern with money and appearance (*Thais C*, ll. 83–96) has prompted Thais to become a prostitute. Running against her sinful desire to be visible, Thais' conversion requires that she endure the ordeal of invisibility. The turning point of the drama occurs with the arrival of Paphnutius, a monk of austere conduct who endeavors to convert the harlot. Voicing the ecclesiastical view on the inherent depravity of female nature, Paphnutius succeeds in imposing on Thais a very harsh regimen of penance. She is not to utter God's name, she is not to raise her hands, and she is to live solely on bread and water. The heroine's pliant submission to her custodian stands in clear contrast to the active and almost febrile way in which Paphnutius takes charge of her fate: "The hermit gave her a mantle and a hat, / And took her along. / He found for her a place close to his, / And had her lodged in a hermitage. / Then he decided that her diet / Would consist of plants, bread, and clear water" (ll. 299–304). Forced confinement, which functions as an obstacle preventing the heroine's former misuse of her appearance, does not immediately immunize her against temptation, and Thais suffers, at first, from the ordeal of enclosure (*Thais C*, l. 317 ff.). Only when her physical beauty fades away does she feel secure in her new environment, thus confirming in her own mind the validity of Paphnutius' authoritative discourse (*Thais C*, l. 385 ff.).

His rational expertise enables Paphnutius to impose his will upon Thais. But, over and above this didactic argument, it is, in reality, spatial freedom that allows him to achieve control. His eremitic existence is interspersed with excursions that take him back into society, as evinced by the episode narrating his first encounter with the protagonist. Even more noteworthy is Paphnutius' ambiguous use of disguise when he attempts to expose the perversity of female appearance. One of the thirteenth-century renditions of the legend mentions how the monk "clothes himself in a secular manner" (*Thais A*, l. 12) and hides his monastic identity in order to be taken for one of Thais' many clients. While this scene seeks to defame women's blind investment in the visible, it is nonetheless noteworthy that Paphnutius uses concealment as a means to enlighten the heroine. Thais must renounce the veils of seductiveness that are women's typical attributes; paradoxically, however, artifice is the very means employed by Paphnutius to achieve this end.

The Thais legend is a typical example of the way hagiographic romance manipulates space in order to exert control over women. Thais herself ends by recognizing the redemptive value of reclusion, a penance she had initially resisted. Indeed, when Paphnutius tells her that she is now forgiven and free to leave her cell, Thais refuses to go out and willingly opts to persevere in this mode of life (*Thais A*, l. 114 and *B*, l. 1660 ff.). The law of male dominance allegedly becomes a matter of free choice on the part of the heroine as she adopts as her own the notion that femininity must remain behind bars. Given the severity of the penance imposed on Thais, it is not surprising that the resolution of her story proportionally exalts the circumstances of the revelation of her holiness. The "royal seat" (*Thais B*, l. 1551) that awaits the heroine in heaven epitomizes in a spectacular way the celestial rewards that compensate for women's earthly miseries. A seat in *Thais B* and a bed in *Thais A* and *C*, the emblem of Thais' sanctification leads the poet of the latter text to elaborate on the pleasures that take place in the divine Chamber: "It now pleases God to place her / In this chamber and on this bed, / For He has chosen her" (ll. 481–83). Thais the saint has supposedly nothing in common with Thais the harlot, as reflected in the fact that the heroine's physical transformation provides her with a new, sexless appearance. Hagiographic resolution nonetheless returns to a generic portrayal. In Heaven as on earth, Thais is securely enclosed within the boundaries set up by her various lords and masters, and only as such can she become exemplary.

Thereafter: The Divine Chamber

The making of a female saint in hagiographic romance entails a single narrative resolution, one that allows the heroine to enter the protective environment of Heaven. This narrative closure has a dual significance. On the one hand, the heroine is henceforth taken away from the world of the flesh and becomes forever a free maiden in the garden of Paradise. On the other, this celestial form of confinement is not without its own sensual overtones, as evoked in the image of the “bed” awaiting Thais. Virginity is, therefore, subject to ambiguous treatment in the portrayal of female perfection. In her lifetime, the heroine must remain chaste at all costs, chastity being the price that guarantees her salvation. But chastity is also to be offered and surrendered in the afterlife, with the result that corporeality remains the one and only means of assessing female virtue.

Yet sensual imagery is not the exclusive characteristic of our textual corpus. Erotic language is, in fact, an important aspect of traditional Christian mysticism. Particularly significant documentation is provided by the medieval interpretations of the Song of Songs, starting with the commentary of Origen of Alexandria (circa 185–circa 254). Essentially, Origen distinguishes between earthly and heavenly corporeality, between the mortal and the incorruptible body, a distinction that is central to his “readings of the Song of Songs as the love between God and the soul.”¹⁷ Origen’s notion of Christian mystical union exerted a profound influence on twelfth-century exegetes, such as Bernard of Clairvaux, in their interpretation of God as Bridegroom. But Bernard was also careful to stress the allegorical significance of erotic imagery. In his words: “Beware, lest you conclude that we see in this union of the Word and the Soul something corporeal or perceptible. We speak of that which the Apostle said, since ‘whoever is united to God becomes one spirit with him.’ (I Corinthians 6:17) As much as we can, we express in words the ecstasy of the pure mind in God, or rather the loving descent of God into the soul, matching spiritual things to the spiritual.”¹⁸ While the bride-chamber imagery evoked the corporeality of the resurrected body, the emphasis was nonetheless on the spiritual character of the union between God and the soul. By contrast, hagiographic romance tends to reformulate the imagery in a manner that articulates a corporeal rather than spiritual understanding of mystical marriage.

A similar insistence on sexual and sensual imagery appears in the writings of female mystics in the later Middle Ages. As Bynum points out,

these real-life women identified more directly with Christ's incarnation than their male counterparts in that they experienced a permeability of body and soul. Radical asceticism "was not only a rejection of a world in which they had little control over their bodies and their destinies [but also] an opportunity to those pious women who wanted, without compromise or moderation, to imitate Christ."¹⁹ Erotic imagery in these accounts does not indicate that pious women could not achieve spiritual union with Christ. Rather, it suggests that, unlike men, who were more inclined to an objective relationship with the Deity, women were prone to a subjective form of religious experience. These accounts vastly differ from the *Lives* of our textual corpus, since corporeality is not an end but a means that externalizes the particular road taken by women mystics in their access to the divine.

Moreover, these mystics' writings constitute an unmediated testimony of women's religious experience. By contrast, the holy heroines of hagiographic romance, who are neither mystics nor direct witnesses, are images that reflect a male perspective on women's piety and perfection. Corporeality does not signal a generically original mode of inner devotion, but serves, rather, to demonstrate the limits of female nature at the physiological and mental levels. Hence the insistence on the extravagant diet, clothing, habitat, and behavior that accompanies the making of a female saint. Consequently, the unfolding of the drama of female sanctity consists of a contradictory movement between excessive incarnation and excessive incarceration, echoing the mixed feelings of desire and rejection that summarize the predominantly male approach to women in secular literature.

The cult of Saint Catherine of Alexandria provides a typical example of this contradictory movement. Regardless of the fact that her legend focuses on the virginal status of the martyr, she became in France the patron saint of young unmarried women anxious to avoid the fate of spinsterhood.²⁰ While her legend exalts her as a strong-willed character, in the narrative translated in this Anthology Catherine becomes a maiden eager to find refuge in the celestial gynaeceum, or "divine harem."²¹ At first, she boldly asserts herself in the face of male pagan authority; but this display of autonomy comes to a halt as soon as she addresses her divine Spouse and evokes in sensual terms the bliss of the afterlife (ll. 987–92). In the concluding segment of her story, she openly concurs with the conventional conception of female frailty: "And may Jesus be praised / For inviting me, today, / To live among the angels / In the company of the maidens / Who, in their fragile nature, / Have kept their virginity" (ll. 1384–89). Order is

preserved, since the poem presents Catherine's inordinate will as a temporary state and since its resolution allows for a resuming of the typical discourse on women.

Like Catherine, Thais, Christina, and many of the characters commemorated in this Anthology, Marina's single obsession is also to join the divine chamber that delimits the only space within which female nature can be sanctified. She, too, readily subscribes to the male view on the redemptive value of enclosing femaleness, and repeatedly voices her need to rely on a Protector. Although paradoxical in the context of the story, the erotic overtones of her response to Christ's call ("My sister, my spouse," l. 981) indicate the spiritual shortcoming of female perfection as it is portrayed in hagiographic romance: "The fair maiden desired nothing more / Than to go to Him who was calling her. / To kiss him all day long / Was her deepest wish" (ll. 1000–03). Hagiographic romance thus allots its heroines a distinct and separate road on the map to salvation. This road, a circular journey, takes them out of the private room of maidenhood only to confine them to the chamber of divine marriage. How to exalt virginity both as the condition and the price for female redemption, such is the challenge facing the hagiographers, and all the more so when the heroine is, like Elizabeth of Hungary, neither a virgin nor a spinster.

Rutebeuf, the author of the *Life* translated in this Anthology, faces the following dilemma: since his heroine is married (a most exceptional state in vernacular hagiography) he must prove Elizabeth's virtue without resorting to the standard motif of virginity. He must, in other words, prove the presence of moral *integritas*, even in the absence of physical *integritas*. Such an unusual case should offer Rutebeuf the opportunity to dwell on the internal and personal merits of his character and to innovate outside the constraints of female corporeality. But Rutebeuf's solution shows, in reality, a failure at portraying feminine devotion other than through gestures and physiological assessments. His references to "maidenhood" and "ladyhood" lead to a fusion or confusion of the sexual, social, and moral rules that chart the habitual territory allocated to female nature.

The first part of the poem narrates how Elizabeth the *maiden* (a virginal young girl) becomes a *lady* (l. 485) through the law of marriage. The latter term serves to position the heroine within the social and economic hierarchy due her rank, while delimiting the mode of virtuous behavior expected of a rich and noble woman. Elizabeth displays her virtue by obeying the dictates of the Church regarding the duties of wealthy ladies. These duties involve specific charitable activities known as the six

“Works of Mercy.”²² Accordingly, Elizabeth visits the sick (ll. 527, 805), welcomes the deprived (l. 531), clothes the poor (ll. 772, 786 ff.), gives alms to the destitute (l. 796), buries the dead (l. 800), and feeds the hungry (l. 811). Thus, her status as *lady* gives Elizabeth the means to become generous and is at the same time an expedient way for Rutebeuf to portray her outside the realm of marriage: the heroine fulfills her Christian duties outdoors, away from the intimate space of married life. In so doing, the poet alters history (Elizabeth’s forced marriage in reality turned into a true love-match), depicts the piety of his heroine in concrete terms, and solves through silence the conflict between holy virginity and terrestrial marriage.

Rutebeuf’s silence on that topic, however, is not total and leads to a second, and equally awkward, response to the dilemma at hand. The only time Elizabeth’s husband is mentioned more than in passing is through a rather remarkable display of indulgence, as Louis accepts being awakened in the middle of the night because of his wife’s insatiable religious devotion (ll. 685–708). Rutebeuf does not evoke Louis’ affectionate submission to Elizabeth’s wishes in order to praise the husband, but to show how his wife succeeds in performing virtuously even within the intimacy of marriage. Here again, Rutebeuf assesses the merit of the *lady* outside, or even against, the marital bond, since Elizabeth’s nocturnal activity, that is, praying, precludes any occurrence of sexual activities. But, once again, his heroine’s behavior does not reflect self-assertiveness. For if the husband figure is erased, it is because another masculine figure takes its place, that of Conrad of Marburg, Elizabeth’s infamous spiritual director.

This role substitution enables Rutebeuf to introduce the conventional motif of female sanctity as submission and obedience:

[Conrad of Marburg] assisted her
 When she made her vow of obedience
 To her Lord. [. . .]
 In the abbey of Eisenach
 —Consecrated to Saint Catherine—
 She made the vow
 To enter the abbey (as we find in our source)
 Should she survive her husband.
 (*Elizabeth A*, ll. 539–41, 544–48)

This allusion to one of the most popular saints of the Christian tradition is noteworthy, for it suggests that contemporary women such as Elizabeth of Hungary turned to these traditional holy figures as sources of inspiration.

As noted by Atkinson, "it is known, for example, that Birgitta [circa 1303–1373] had a special devotion to Saint Agnes, that Joan of Arc was guided by Saints Margaret and [C]atherine, that Margery Kempe [circa 1373–circa 1438] wished to emulate Mary Magdalene."²³ But Atkinson also underscores the fact that these saintly legends were grounded in violence as much as in virtue. While men and women were beaten and burned, women saints were also sexually humiliated and assaulted, stripped naked, taken to brothels, and subjected to tortures such as the mauling of their breasts. Since male saints were spared corresponding tortures, it is "difficult to avoid the conclusion that such passages were experienced as erotic" (p. 189). On the highest level, these legends provided pious women with examples of "active and heroic femininity" (p. 188). Given our poets' tendency to rewrite these legends in a way that obfuscates the heroines' self-assertiveness, however, it is a lower level of interest that prevails. In the case of Margery Kempe, who—according to the scribe to whom she dictated her life—revered Saints Catherine, Margaret, Agnes, Lucy, Cecilia, Juliana, and all those holy women who "revel now in God's arms as Queens of Heaven,"²⁴ these legends "may have exacerbated her fear of sexual violence." Mystics such as Margery, Birgitta, and other married women who aspired to sanctity, were aware that loss of their virginal status irremediably prevented them from emulating these holy models and were correspondingly obsessed by the desire to attain some form of physical *integritas*.

Rutebeuf's mention of Saint Catherine in the above quotation, which does not emphasize any of the qualities that are traditionally part of her legend, suggests, in Elizabeth of Hungary, the presence of a comparable fear of sexuality. Saint Catherine is not here an example of resistance and defiance, but an embodiment of the conventional "feminine" virtues of meekness and silence that insure women's protection from sexual harassment. The evocation of Saint Catherine serves to exalt the merit of female enclosure, rather than to inspire Elizabeth into leading an autonomous life. Although Elizabeth the married lady is able to perform virtuously, it is only in the cloister that she will find the proper setting for fulfilling her destiny. Thus, in the view of the poet as well of Conrad, Louis' death is desirable and a turning point toward "freedom," since widowhood will enable Elizabeth to adopt a mode of life better suited to her spiritual blossoming. Elizabeth's vow to Conrad indicates that she acknowledges his superiority over her and accepts as her own his implicit denigration of terrestrial marriage. Surreptitiously, the term *lady* no longer signifies a noble and married woman, but now exalts the saint's humble (i.e., pliant) acceptance

of masculine authority. She follows the program that Conrad imposes upon her, including excessive attention to diet (ll. 549–62), chastisement of the flesh (ll. 700–06),²⁵ distrust of clothing (ll. 759–61), and fear of visibility (l. 779). In imitation of the Virgin Mary, in whom Rutebeuf's protagonist finds a proper model of behavior (as contained, for example, in the heroine's observance of the Feast of Purification: l. 753),²⁶ Elizabeth strives to achieve perfect humility and to attain a form of physical *integritas* that will enable her to become worthy of joining the "divine harem." At last able to fulfill her promise and devote herself "to the Friend that one must love" (l. 369), Elizabeth loses both her husband and her inheritance. At this point in the narrative, Rutebeuf no longer calls her a *lady* but a *widow* (l. 1036). In view of the Church's favorable disposition toward widowhood,²⁷ the poet finds it easier to praise the holiness of his no-longer-married heroine. Rutebeuf himself specifies that Elizabeth ceases to be a *lady* when she becomes a "poor woman" (l. 1037), as if the final obstacle to female sanctity were thus removed.

In the last section of his poem, Rutebeuf succeeds in recovering the theme of virginity (incongruous in the particular case of Elizabeth of Hungary) by erasing all traces of Elizabeth's status as a married woman. Her three children are conveniently sent away during the episode that describes her material hardship (l. 1121). And Elizabeth ends her life enclosed within the exclusive company of women. The protagonist continues practicing works of mercy, but it is her admirably humble disposition toward her "sisters" that Rutebeuf chooses to stress, as Elizabeth insists on becoming the servant of her own servants: "A *lady* before, she was now a *maiden*" (l. 1798). Hers is, indeed, a circular story in that, beginning as a literal maiden (a virginal young girl), she ends as a figurative maiden by virtue of the convent walls that hold female corporeality in definitive abeyance.

Here and Now: In the Margin

In each of the texts contained in this Anthology, suffering is presented as a prerequisite for the attainment of sainthood. Forced exposure, forced enclosure, accusation, condemnation, tortures, and death at the stake are integral components of our narratives, which thus deserve the qualification of "sacrificial" texts. But hagiography is not the only type of literary composition in which suffering plays a major role. The above-mentioned scene

of the encounter between Lancelot and Guinevere in Chrétien's romance suggests that suffering characterizes also the making of secular greatness. Whether we consider the amorous communication that unites the knight and his Lady, or the allegedly spiritual relationship between the saintly heroine and God, the contact between devotee and deity appears to involve suffering. The discourse of romance—both secular and hagiographic—can therefore be characterized as an ideology of suffering, since the experience of human or divine love seems inevitably grounded in pain.

At the same time, however, suffering is given a widely different value. In Lancelot's story, for example, suffering is proportional to the *spatial* distance that separates devotee and divinity; and bliss coincides with a reduction of space, when the two terms unite within the protective enclosure of Guinevere's chamber. By contrast, in a typical Saint's Life such as Gautier de Coinci's *Christina*, suffering is proportional to the *temporal* distance that differentiates the realm of the material from the realm of the spiritual. In the hagiographic text, bliss occurs at the end of time, when the holy heroine's terrestrial death allows her to join Christ in Heaven. Suffering is, therefore, a common narrative topos in hagiography and courtly romances, but a topos that the authors of our poems use in order to prove the moral superiority of their enterprise. The listeners are told that there is nothing in common between Lancelot's suffering and Christina's suffering, because one endures agony in the name of passionate love while the other endures martyrdom to the extent that she refuses terrestrial love. Gautier de Coinci asks his public to recognize simultaneously the fictional and fallacious value of suffering as the motif prevails in courtly ideology and the didactic and redemptive value of suffering when it is offered to God. Vernacular hagiographers defend the authoritative status of their discourse (as opposed to the discourse of secular literature) by implying that secular romance lacks transcendence, since the merit of suffering is exclusively proportional to space and its reward is assessed in relation to the flesh. In their view, courtly ideology is a subversive interpretation of suffering, while the hagiographic discourse is, starting with the ninth-century *Sequence of Saint Eulalia*, the first and only legitimate discourse on suffering.

This claim is, of course, contradicted by the fact that hagiographic romance fails to prove the transcendental meaning of suffering as that motif functions in the stories of martyrs and hermits which constitute the essential part of our textual corpus. Death is not presented as a turning point toward timelessness, as hagiographers would like their audiences to believe, but rather as a terminal point in the heroine's journey. As is the case of

Chrétien's *Lancelot*, bliss coincides with a reduction of space, when devotee and divinity come into contact within the enclosure of a chamber. Narratives that commemorate female perfection are, in that sense, just as obsessed with the flesh as are the secular narratives that they endeavor to condemn. The language used to describe the saintly heroine's physical beauty, her tortured flesh, and the heavenly bliss awaiting her is uniformly sexual—as is the language that the saint herself uses. It is difficult, for example, to determine whether the saints refer to Christ or to a mortal man when, like Saint Agnes, they express their love for the One who is “more courteous and stronger” than any potential suitors, and with whom “I have spent all my life” (ll. 87–96). Not only are tortures and physical humiliation the climax of the narratives translated in this Anthology, they are also the price of female salvation. And not only is the heroine asked to sacrifice herself in order to redeem her unfortunate nature, but she is, above all, sacrificed in order to insure and confirm the distinction between maleness and materiality.

Whether the portrayal of female perfection in hagiographic romance strictly belongs to the realm of fiction and, as such, is not representative of contemporary views on exchange and interaction between men and women remains debatable. Yet the celebrated story of Heloise and Abelard, as contained in their correspondence, suggests that the hagiologic tendency both to victimize and enshrine women was a widespread practice, at least in literary creation.

Time has preserved a number of documents—including Abelard's *Story of My Misfortunes* and the correspondence between him and Heloise—that relate the story of Heloise and Abelard. A brilliant dialectician and rhetorician, Abelard first met Heloise in 1117 when she was seventeen or eighteen and already noted for her knowledge. Hired by Fulbert, Heloise's uncle and tutor, to serve as her teacher, Abelard quickly became her lover. The couple eventually married but insisted on denying this fact, a denial that prompted Fulbert to beat Heloise (to protect her, Abelard took her to a convent at Argenteuil) and to order that Abelard be castrated. From then on, Abelard devoted himself to his theological studies, while Heloise took the veil. The period that interests us most directly concerns an encounter that took place some ten years after Abelard's physical ordeal. When Heloise's community were evicted from their Argenteuil convent, Abelard offered to house the nuns at the Paraclete, a monastery that he had founded in 1124 but which was unoccupied in 1129. The local inhabitants being scandalized by his presence in the convent, Abelard returned to Brittany

where he began writing his autobiographical *Story of My Misfortunes*. A copy of this text reached the Paraclete and inspired Heloise to give him her own version of their story.

The ensuing correspondence between the two former lovers, which constitutes the most significant document with respect to their love affair, is the locus of a particularly eloquent debate on the status of woman as defined by Abelard's viewpoint and as understood and experienced by Heloise. The authenticity of these letters is still the subject of intense scholarly debate.²⁸ For some, the letters, which are authentic and probably date from 1132 to 1133, were collected by Heloise herself at a later time. Others maintain that Abelard, or inversely Heloise, is their sole author. Still others argue that the documents are fabrications, perhaps inspired by authentic records or by oral tradition. In any case, the letters remained unknown for a century after Heloise's death in 1163. Regardless of authorship, this correspondence is, therefore, a composition of high significance in the literary context of the thirteenth century, the period that immortalized the lovers' story.

These letters are part of a contemporary meditation on the nature of love. In the correspondence as, for example, in the *Romance of the Rose*, this meditation is the locus of two radically opposed views on the concept of communication. The first perspective is, essentially, a defense of the ideology of suffering, as expressed by Guillaume de Lorris, the author of the first part of the *Romance of the Rose*, and by Abelard, the authentic or fictive epistolary writer. By contrast, both Jean de Meun, the author of the second part of the *Romance of the Rose*, and Heloise call into question a notion of love that, in their views, engenders distance rather than union and unduly associates true love and self-sacrifice. In Jean's romance, Heloise's greatest achievement is her praise of free love: "she asked [Abelard] to love her but not to claim any [rights over] her except those of grace and freedom, without lordship or mastery."²⁹ Yet in the correspondence Heloise does not so much praise free love as acknowledge the alienating effects of her own unsatisfied desire, now that Abelard has forsaken her.³⁰ In Heloise's views, her loss and present suffering are not her own making, but his; nor do they serve an edifying purpose.³¹ In his epistolary responses, however, Abelard persists in idealizing Heloise's present misery as an indication that she has willingly opted to sacrifice herself, thus allowing them to achieve a spiritual union. Just as her former lover relentlessly exalts her decision to devote her life in loving God, Heloise relentlessly laments the disappearance of his love for her. While Abelard focuses on the present and, especially, on the future

bliss that awaits her in Paradise, Heloise turns to the past and evokes the events that led to her present misery.³² Heloise's abundant use of sexual language in reliving their affair is not a rhetorical imagery, but an open acknowledgment that the love whose loss she laments included love of the flesh. These "profane" passages in Heloise's letters may have motivated, in Dronke's words, the scholarly doubts as to their authenticity.³³ If Heloise's version of her affair with Abelard is, indeed, unedifying, this takes its full significance in the context of Abelard's biased interpretation of his and her "misfortunes."

Erotic imagery, which is also abundantly present in Abelard's letters, serves a vastly different purpose. On the one hand, he uses sexual language in order to revise and reject Heloise's "profane" evocation of their affair. For example, he characterizes as lust the male desire that prompted him to seduce the young, beautiful, and virginal Heloise.³⁴ Abelard's erotic imagery also exploits, on the other hand, the conventional interpretation of the Song of Songs in an attempt to convince Heloise that her misery has a spiritual significance. His exaltation of Heloise's suffering is thus grounded in the argument that "she began to be his superior from the day when she began to be his lady on becoming the bride of his Lord" (*Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, tr. Radice, 1978, 137). He is only a servant of Christ, while she is His Bride, who deserves, as such, the "martyr's crown" for continually chastising her flesh. According to Abelard, her ordeal is, in fact, a blessing in disguise, "for you were previously the wife of a poor mortal and now are raised to the bed of the King of kings" (p. 138).

Abelard's references to the Song of Songs also allows him to invoke the mystical bonds that unite them as brother and sister in Christ, and to depict Heloise simultaneously as God's daughter, queen, bride, and above all, maiden. This last term appears in the context of a prayer composed by Abelard for Heloise's benefit, where the association between female sacrifice, enclosure, and subservience becomes all the more clear:

Punish now, lest thou punish in eternity. Take to thy servants the rod of correction, not the sword of wrath. Afflict their flesh that thou mayst preserve their souls. Come as a redeemer, not an avenger; gracious rather than just; the merciful Father, not the stern Lord (*Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, tr. Radice, 1978, 155).

In the name of her redemption, Abelard justifies his having condemned her to the convent. That his castration took away both his lust for, and interest in, Heloise is compensated by the idealizing depiction of the alleged superi-

ority of female suffering.³⁵ For Abelard, the exposing and exploring of Heloise's flesh now hold no significance; hence he describes her ordeal of forced enclosure as a portent of celestial bliss. The order of the flesh, which used to be his own personal delight and which he "publicized" through love-songs that acquired fame for him and notoriety for Heloise, is now hers alone to confront, sublimate, and offer to a superior Lord. The only space on earth that will save her from the flesh and the only road that will lead her to salvation require constant chastisement and circumscribing of her self and gender. While Abelard will lead an active intellectual life, Heloise will remain in the enclosure of the Paraclete, invisible to him and non-existent, except as an instrumental object of his salvation.³⁶ Female enshrinement: such is the fate of a lover now transformed into an emblem of virginal sanctity.

In their attempt to glorify Heloise the Abbess as an admirable embodiment of spiritual femaleness, Abelard's letters thus readily resort to the conventional imagery of hagiography. He mentions the physical transformation that externalizes female virtue, the enclosure whose function is to prevent women from succumbing to vanity and public display, and the value of chastity in helping women to climb the ladder leading to God. He also proposes a definition of the female self as entirely subordinated to the principle of male creation.³⁷ An indirect rejection of Heloise's earlier claim that she is nothing but his creation, Abelard's self-effacement behind God is the ultimate manipulation through which he simultaneously erases both his persona as lover and Heloise's self-identity. In Abelard's rewriting Heloise's story, biography becomes hagiography, as he attempts to turn hers into an edifying story. In the resulting text, the passionate love of Heloise for Abelard is superseded, or replaced, by her love for Christ. Abelard cancels out their love story by inventing a Passion of Saint Heloise in which suffering is both her duty and her virtue. Hence his exaltation of Heloise the martyr, according to a one-sided practice of charity which requires that she forsake herself so as to intercede for him before God.

Heloise is, however, neither duped nor silenced by Abelard's conservative and self-serving view on the female mode of virtue. She replies by rejecting this sacrificial perception of female salvation and by pointing to Abelard as her sole and real persecutor. The unedifying aspect of her letters aims at refuting Abelard's attempt to eradicate the "real" Heloise and to create a saint-like fictional character. Expert as she is in Abelard's own intentional ethics, Heloise is thus able to dismantle and demystify the pedestal of female excellence, while exposing its persecuting implications.

Quoting Jerome, she retorts: "I do not seek the crown of victory."³⁸ She refuses the mediating and self-denying role that Abelard wants to impose on her, in part simply by *speaking*. Heloise as speaking subject nullifies Abelard's manipulative depiction of her as saint.

By contrast, the heroines celebrated in hagiographic romance are condemned to muteness and transfigured into idealized statues. They are fictional images within a discourse where they function as objects and never appear as speaking subjects, for the ability to speak is by definition an attribute of maleness. In this authoritative discourse, the power to meditate is man's alone, while woman's role is to mediate for his, and thus her, salvation.

Conclusion

Even within their lifetime, in the narrative section of their story, female saints are frequently exalted through an economic imagery that expresses their spiritual merit in terms of material value.³⁹ The accumulation of similes proves that, while the medieval concept of commerce contradicts the modern definition of exchange as gain and profit,⁴⁰ there is a definite equivalence between the saints' holiness, worthiness, and functional value. Even a cursory review of the exchange that allegedly takes place between the saints and the believers shows a clear disproportion in commercial terms. The saints must die in order for the believers to survive and eventually reach Paradise, and the believers must invoke the saints' names to be granted these rewards. This disparity is justified in part by the believers' own acknowledgment of unworthiness, in part by the saints' preferred treatment in Paradise.

There is, however, an obvious disparity in the respective manner in which each party gains salvation, given the antithetical understanding of suffering as the topic functions in the Lives of this Anthology. On the one hand, all the poems extol martyrdom as the sole road to sanctity; on the other, the believers addressed in the epilogues commemorate the saints in the hope of avoiding pain on earth and in Hell, usually in that order. Difference between holiness and ordinary humanity seeks to demonstrate the exceptional merit of the heroines. Yet difference is, above all, a sign of abnormality that compels these heroines to be ostracized and finally sacrificed. Their story evolves in a spatial context and ends with their being enclosed in a sphere distant from the world of daily existence.

By contrast, the didactic conclusion of these Lives evokes a temporal rather than spatial dimension. It is in terms of time and duration that the believers expect to be rewarded in exchange for their devotion. They call upon the saints in order to be cured and thus allowed to live longer, and in order to be protected from sudden death and the risk of eternal damnation. Such an “exchange” between saints and devotees is, in reality, a unilateral donation on the part of holy characters whose death becomes the source of inexhaustible benefits. The enshrining of holiness signifies, in the case of the female saints of hagiographic romance, that their value is assessed in strictly economic terms. All these narratives unfold in a manner that reduces the autonomy of the heroines during their life, while underscoring their ultimate mediating value as miracle-workers.

According to the epilogues of most hagiographic poems, the posthumous function of a typical male as well as female holy protagonist is, indeed, to become a source of cures and protection. But gender distinction entails a treatment of the heroine’s body that has no equivalent in the case of the holy hero. The double ending of the story of Elizabeth is here highly symbolic:

In great haste, a crowd
 Came to cut out a piece of her.
 Parts of her hair and breast
 Were cut.
 Her toes, her fingernails
 Were likewise cut, and perhaps more parts also.
 And the people would have dismembered her totally,
 If they not had been prevented from doing so.
 (*Elizabeth*, ll. 2037–44)

In an ultimate exposure of the female body, disrobing and dismemberment signal the undoing of the heroine and her transmutation into fragments endowed with miraculous power. The idealized portrayal of female sanctity inevitably leads to a dispersion and eradication of the heroine.

To divide in order to rule: the insistence with which hagiographic romance visualizes and then fragments the holy heroines that it commemorates would seem incongruous in the midst of a discourse insisting on their natural inferiority and powerlessness, were it not for the ensuing effect this has upon male priority and precedence. Defined in accordance with visible corporeality, female virtue or female worth is strictly equivalent to matter. The pertinence of the medieval hagiographic tradition lies in this forced

synonymy between worth and face value. The heroine's "secret" is none other than her materiality; once exposed and revealed, secrecy disappears and loses its interest. Visibility on the pedestal, therefore, is of the same nature as that at the stake, for what is really "at stake" in both cases is the representation of the heroine as a presence with content. In fact, excessively visible corporeality serves, above all, to prove the inanity of her "secret." If power is the opposite of this marginalization of the inner self, ostracized figures such as the protagonists celebrated in our textual corpus must claim their right to join men at the center of the stage, but at the risk of ratifying the general and not exclusively medieval homology between power and fame. The real, and non-gendered, question is whether worth can be recognized or assessed outside visibility.

Our examination of the saints commemorated in this Anthology indicates that violence is both an integral part of the process of forced exposure that projects all these heroines (martyrs and non-martyrs alike) onto center stage and the most explicit evidence of the sacrificial import of these portrayals. French hagiographic romance, which is in effect a violation of the female body, is thus of high significance with respect to the representation of women. Like many female characters—and women writers—in the romantic tradition, our saintly protagonists are "locked into male texts"⁴¹ and, as such, into the construct of an authoritative male discourse on the proper place of women. Clearly not "the subject of her own autonomous language, of her own desire, and of her own history,"⁴² the heroine is an object fabricated by this discourse as it interprets desire and history. That most of our poems have a legendary origin plays a major role in the tendency of hagiographic romance to reify its protagonist. On the basis of an imaginary past, the authors idealize their heroines in a way that supports the conventional view of the world order.

As female and as speaking subject, Heloise both confirms and questions the persecuting dimension of man's discourse on women and its implications regarding their autonomy. Another female voice, that of Christine de Pizan at the end of the fourteenth century, demystifies the ideal image of the Lady in the hagiographic and courtly tradition by showing that it is both a creation, and the locus, of male violence. Meditating, in her *Letter to the God of Love* (1399), on male writers' obsessive interest in the "maiden," such as Jean de Meun in his *Romance of the Rose*, whom she cites, Christine wonders: "Does such a defenseless object deserve to be in this way assaulted?" She answers this rhetorical question by underscoring the fact that "these books, against women, were not written by women," for "women do not kill, do not maim, and do not torture anyone."⁴³

Christine de Pizan is also a particularly interesting case since she endeavored, in the last section of *The Book of the City of Ladies*, to commemorate a number of exemplary women, among which many of our saintly heroines figure. Christine attempts to rewrite the male discourse on female perfection by focusing on certain "great" women of the hagiographic tradition, and by emphasizing their contribution to the christianization of the world. Her goal is to undercut the traditionally sacrificial interpretation of female holiness by portraying her heroines as speaking subjects, rather than as objects exclusively assessed in relation to the flesh. To do so, Christine de Pizan employs two specific strategies. First, she stresses the sacrificial significance of the canon of female sanctity as it is articulated in the traditional male discourse. And second, she makes her saintly heroines aware of their role as sacrificial victims, an awareness which enables these characters, and herself through them, to negate the conventional equation between femaleness and materiality.

An illustration is her rendition of the *Life of Saint Christina*, which is located at the center of the third book of the *City* and constitutes its climactic moment. Christine introduces her story of Saint Christina by citing Vincent de Beauvais (circa 1190–1264) as her source. As recently argued by a number of experts,⁴⁴ Christine de Pizan thus implies that she will present a new and original version of Vincent's Latin account, the largest difference between Vincent's and her version being her own treatment of the saint's parents. In Vincent's account, the heroine's mother plays an important, hysterical role; it is she who has named her daughter Christina. By contrast, in the *City* Christina has no mother, and this serves to stress the abusive aspect of the control exerted by male figures such as that of Saint Christina's father-tyrant. The fact that Saint Christina receives her name from Christ indicates that, in the *City*, the word is made flesh in a Christ-like manner. Word and flesh coincide in such a way as to endow the heroine with spiritual significance. The emphasis is no longer on Christina the fleshly heroine, but on Christina the eloquent saint, an eloquence which continues even after the heroine's tongue is ripped out. Choosing as the climax of her third book what is probably the most violent legend of the hagiographic tradition, Christine de Pizan succeeds in endowing her heroine with an ethical rather than aesthetic significance, while also demonstrating the sacrificial character of the conventional portrayal of female perfection.

The sacrificial aspect inherent in the traditional exaltation of female virtue is best illustrated in Christine's rendition of the legend of Marina the transvestite. Retelling the event of the saint's death, Christine says: "When

[the brothers of the monastery] undressed the corpse and discovered that Brother Marinus was a woman, they began to beat themselves and to cry out, grieved and perplexed by the harm they had done *without cause* to such a holy creature, and they were overwhelmed with wonder at her way of life.”⁴⁵ The word “accusation” (*ad causam*) implies, etymologically, the existence of a cause justifying that an individual be condemned. That Marina is accused *without cause* proves that the making of a female saint involves a specific treatment (which takes here the form of ostracism) and a treatment different from the norm (which is here embodied by the brothers of the monastic community). Christine shows how, in this Passion-like story as in the other texts celebrating the holy women of the Christian tradition, difference is supposed to be the mark of perfection, but has, in reality, a persecuting significance.

In a manner similar to that employed by Marie de France (late twelfth century), whose novellas constitute a rewriting of the male courtly tradition,⁴⁶ Christine de Pizan sought to destabilize the hagiographic canon by unmasking its ideological implications. These medieval women writers showed a profound awareness of the victimizing aspects implicit in the male idealization of women in the vernacular literary production. Their own textual corpus is, in part, an attempt to rewrite woman, and the history of woman, in order to denounce a portrayal traditionally located within the confines of materiality. What these authors contested was not only the violence of the male text on femaleness, but also a textual tradition that posited violence as a prerequisite for all interactions. Against this tradition and its ideology of suffering, they attempted to articulate a different, and nonviolent, notion of exchange and of communication. Against a portrayal traditionally grounded in corporeality, their voice assigned a spiritual dimension to the representation of women by allowing it to become the locus of a transformation of the flesh into words.

Notes

1. Hence the abundance of such figures as the “ladder of perfection,” the “garden of Paradise,” or the “circles of Hell”: see A. J. Gourevitch (1983), 75–95.
2. See C. H. Talbot’s translation, *The Life of Christina of Markyate. A Twelfth-Century Recluse* (1959).
3. Talbot, 103–105.
4. For an analysis of the St. Albans Psalter, see Otto Pächt (1960).
5. Like George and Lawrence, to name two examples from twelfth-century French hagiography: see P. A. Johnson and B. Cazelles (1979), 248–55 and 269–70.

6. E. Patlagean (1976), 597–63.
7. J. Anson (1974), 5.
8. Anson (1974), 30.
9. Anson (1974), 17.
10. H. Delehaye (1927), 224–33.
11. V. L. Bullough (1974), 1383.
12. On this history of cross-dressing, see the articles in *Historical Perspective on Homosexuality*, ed. S. J. Licata and R. P. Petersen, in *Journal of Homosexuality*, 6 (1980–1981).
13. Joan of Arc remains one of the most illustrious historical examples of the way medieval society reacted against, and ostracized, extraordinary female behavior.
14. On the treatment of space in the Alexis story, see B. Cazelles, “Outrepasser les normes: l’invention de soi en France médiévale” (1990).
15. See Johnson and Cazelles (1979), 262–68.
16. E. Mâle (1958), 2, 213–16.
17. E. Ann Matter (1990), 22.
18. Sermon XXXI.ii.6, cited by Matter (1990), 128.
19. C. W. Bynum (1987), 218.
20. See N. Z. Davis (1965), 75.
21. J. T. Schulenburg (1986), 31.
22. See M.-H. Vicaire (1978), 21–44.
23. C. W. Atkinson (1983), 189.
24. Quoted by C. W. Atkinson, 187.
25. Taking Christ’s model literally, Elizabeth asks to be beaten “every day during Lent” and every Friday the rest of the year (ll. 709–12).
26. The Virgin Mary’s exemplary self-effacement served to reinforce the conventional exaltation of humility and obedience as two specifically “feminine” virtues: see P. S. Gold (1985), 70.
27. P. Riché (1968), 394.
28. The whole correspondence comprises four “personal letters” (cf. Radice’s translation of the Latin original, 1978, 109–56) and three “letters of direction.” On the scholarly debate as to the authenticity of this document, see Linda Georgianna (1987), 221–23.
29. *The Romance of the Rose*, tr. Ch. Dahlberg (1983), 160.
30. “Even during the celebration of the Mass, when our prayers should be purer, lewd visions of [our pleasures as lovers] take such a hold upon my unhappy soul that my thoughts are on their wantonness instead of on prayers. I should be groaning over the sins I have committed, but I can only sigh for what I have lost.” (Tr. Radice, 133.)
31. “I carried out everything for your sake and continue up to the present moment in complete obedience to you. It was not any sense of vocation which brought me as a young girl to accept the austerities of the cloister, but your bidding alone, and if I deserve no gratitude from you, you may judge for yourself how my labours are in vain” (Tr. Radice, 116–17).
32. “My love rose to such heights of madness that it robbed itself of what it most desired beyond hope of recovery, when immediately at your bidding I changed my clothing along with my mind, in order to prove you the sole possessor

of my body and my will alike. [...] I wanted simply you, nothing of yours. I looked for no marriage-bond, no marriage portion, and it was not my own pleasures and wishes I sought to gratify, as you well know, but yours. The name of wife may seem more sacred or more binding, but sweeter for me will always be the word mistress, or, if you will permit me, that of concubine or whore" (Tr. Radice, 113).

33. P. Dronke (1984), 108.

34. "My love, which brought us both to sin, should be called lust, not love. I took my fill of my wretched pleasures in you, and this was the sum total of my love" (Tr. Radice, 153).

35. P. Kamuf shows the empowering effect of Abelard's castration, which allows him "to become a man of God" among the women of the Paraclete: like a eunuch and as his Master's proxy, "he functions in a stable opposition to the women of the household and guarantees their exclusion from the masculine domain" (1982, 42).

36. "Your chief concern must be for the salvation of my soul, and you must show the dead man how much you loved the living by the special support of prayers chosen for him" (Tr. Radice, 126).

37. "He named you Heloise, after his own name, Elohim" (Tr. Radice, 149).

38. According to Dronke's translation of this passage (1984), 131. In her analysis of Heloise's critique of the Benedictine rule as it applies or, rather, is inappropriate to the nuns of the Paraclete, Georgianna (see note 28 above) notes that Heloise's refusal of "the crown of victory" is in fact a refusal of Abelard's "traditional heroic description of her spiritual life" (p. 250). Heloise rejects his "larger-than-life portrayal of her spiritual state" (p. 251), just as she rejects his abstract, rhetorical use of Song of Songs imagery, because of her awareness that she lacks pure contrition and pure love. At this point in her life, her only hope is not perfection, but salvation (p. 252).

39. Agnes, for instance, describes Christ's love for her in terms of pearls, gems, and riches (l. 106); Barbara praises God as possessing the whole silver and gold of the world (l. 245) and is herself depicted as a jewel (l. 266); and Euphrosina is to Christ what a gem is in a ring (l. 448).

40. J. Le Goff (1986), 18 ff.

41. S. M. Gilbert and S. Gubar (1979), 83.

42. L. W. Rabine (1985), 12.

43. Ed. Roy, vol 2, ll. 389–98, and l. 645.

44. Such as M. Quilligan (1988) and K. Brownlee (in *Images of Sainthood*, ed. R. Blumenfeld-Kosinski and T. Szell, 1991).

45. Tr. E. J. Richards (1982), 243. (My italics).

46. This author's current research examines Marie de France's *Lais* as a rewriting of the courtly tradition, with particular emphasis on Marie's response to the prevalence of violence as the primary means of communication in conventional secular romances.

II

Anthology

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The Life of Saint Agnes

Version A

“Qui bien velt commenchie a parler”

There are two extant versions of the story of Saint Agnes in thirteenth-century verse hagiography. The first one is a 984-line poem in decasyllabic rhyming quatrains, which is contained in a single manuscript.¹ According to its editor, Denomy, the poem dates from approximately 1250, or a little before.²

Little is known about the author, except that he was from the north-west of France near Laon, and probably a cleric, given his technical knowledge of Church liturgy. Denomy identifies a sixth-century text, the *Gesta Sanctae Agnes*, as the probable source of this French version (p. 133). The French poet adds drama and pathos through reductions which shorten the preaching to the benefit of dialogues and action.

The cult of Saint Agnes results from a combination of two main traditions. The Latin legend, on the one hand, celebrates a very young maiden martyred during the third century. Tradition soon displaced the time of Agnes' death to the fourth century.³ The Greek legend, on the other hand, venerates a Roman Saint Agnes, martyred in 157 under Septimius Severus, and introduces the theme of virginity. The sixth-century *Gesta* combines the two legends by borrowing from the Greek legend the dramatic bordello episode, and from the Roman tradition, the reference to the heroine's young age.

Agnes A is chronologically the first French version of the legend. Along with *Agnes B* and a fourteenth-century poem by Nicholas Bozon, many renditions in other vernacular languages attest to the popularity of the legend throughout Western Europe. Each of these texts derives either from the *Gesta* or from Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend*. The cult is too ancient to allow for much deviation from the basic story. Popular etymology associates Agnes with the Greek word for “chaste” and with the Latin *agnus* (“lamb”), a symbol of the heroine's sweet innocence. Additional anecdotes, such as the miracle of her hair or of the white mantle, are attempts to

illustrate such etymological meanings. Emerentiana (“Esmeree” in *Agnes A.*, translated here as “Emerald”) becomes part of the legend because she was buried beside Agnes,⁴ and Constantina duplicates the legend of her father Constantine. Iconography represents Agnes as a mature woman and very early depicts her with a lamb (as in the sixth-century mosaic at Ravenna), or with the flames and sword of her tortures.⁵

The following translation begins with the opening of the narrative proper.

- 33 Once upon a time in Rome, there was a maiden,
 Very courteous and wise, the daughter of a noble man.
 My source calls her Saint Agnes
- 36 And I will now tell you about her life.
 Rome was then in the hands of the pagans,
 But this man was a very faithful Christian.
 He loved his daughter more than anyone
- 40 For she was endowed with all virtues.
 God had bestowed on her His gift
 For she was most beautiful.
 No one in Rome could equal her.
- 44 Nature had performed a marvellous feat.
 But the young girl had no care
 For the beauty to which death puts an end.
 Her only concern was for God,
- 48 And for His divine law.
 This maiden was wise and learned.
 Young in terms of age,
 She was only in her thirteenth year
- 52 And was still going to school with the other children.
 As she was returning from school one day,
 A young lad saw her, and was very moved.
 All of his senses were captured by her beauty
- 56 And he longed greatly to satisfy his desire.
 Through his close friends, he made his request.
 Asking for her love in exchange,
 He had them promise her gold and silver.
- 60 But she had no interest in this kind of love.
 When his friends failed to persuade her,
 He presented himself at her house.
 “Fair lass,” he said, “I am your prisoner,
- 64 And suffer a great deal because of you.
 Your beauty has moved me most deeply,
 And the sight of you made me change color.
 You will see me die of suffering
- 68 If I do not become yours.

- If you so desire, I will take you as my wife,
 And I will give you whatever you wish.
 I will offer you more sheets and covers
 72 Than three mattresses could support.
 My father is a most noble man,
 And has many riches in the city of Rome.
 And you will be the mistress of them all,
 76 If you agree to take pity on me.”
 The maiden, whose only care was God,
 Gave him this wise answer:
 “Now that the fire of lust has overcome you,
 80 Do you think this makes you my spouse?
 You have dreamt a foolish dream.
 I have no care for you; your words are worth nothing.
 For my thoughts reside elsewhere.
 84 I have no concern for you or for your gifts.
 Flee from me, disappear from my sight,
 For your words are for me daughters of death.
 I love another, more courteous and stronger.
 88 He has my love, and I will remain faithful to Him.
 He is most handsome; His face shines,
 And he is king and emperor of the whole universe.
 His father did not sire Him through a woman,
 92 And His mother will forever be a virgin.
 My friend is of such nobility
 That no description could ever account for it.
 I have spent all my life with Him,
 96 And will not abandon His love.
 He generously gave me a mantle,
 Whose clasps are made of chastity.
 He has given me His ring,
 100 And has entrusted me with His seal.
 Flee from me! you are only a fool.
 Leave me alone, and address your request elsewhere.
 For my friend has done me so much good
 104 That for nothing in the world will I ever renounce His love.
 He gave me as ornaments
 Pearls, gems, and riches
 Whose beauty does not shine forth
 108 But whose sweetness is felt inside.
 In His mouth, words taste like honey,
 And His speech is so soft
 That, on His command, all evil disappeared.
 112 I am all His, and care for nothing else.
 His blood gives color to my face,
 His gaze makes me beautiful.

- I am very close to Him,
 116 And will never be the spouse of anyone else.
 He has given me hope:
 If I remain faithful to Him,
 He will honor me greatly.
 120 He tells the truth, and I trust Him."
 Understanding that he had failed,
 The lad leaves the place.
 His request has been rebuked
 124 And he goes away, very troubled.
 And his pains do not diminish.
 He falls ill, life no longer matters to him.
 All this illness results from his madness.
 128 His father hears him, and has a doctor brought in.
 The doctor comes, gives the lad some medicine,
 But is unable to discover the source of his pain,
 Whether it is in his liver or in his lungs.
 132 He does not know the name of this illness.
 But the sighs that agitate him
 And the complexion of his face
 Make them realize that he is suffering from lovesickness.
 136 It is so obvious that he cannot hide it any more.
 He tells them: "The other day, I saw a maiden
 Who kindled a fire in my body
 And burned and lashed my heart so much
 140 That she cast on me a new kind of death."
 When the father heard of his son's ordeal,
 He came to the maiden and said:
 "Fair lass, do not take badly my request,
 144 But accept my son, and I will give you a fief."
 She answers wisely:
 "Lord, I have given my heart
 And am betrothed to a better man.
 148 I will not betray Him.
 He replies: "How could you entrust yourself to another man?
 This fact grieves me greatly
 For, as the prefect, one must serve me.
 152 You should not place anyone above me.
 Who is he, and what is the name
 Of the man whose love you claim?"
 She replies: "He is most noble,
 156 And His beauty surpasses that of the sun or moon."
 At this point, a servant arrives.
 "Lord," he says, "I will reveal to you
 What kind of love fills her heart.
 160 She is a Christian, do not be mistaken.

- She has invested her soul in this evil creed,
 And says that Jesus is her friend.
 This is why she has no care for your possessions,
 164 Your request, or your power.
 She loves, honors, and adores Jesus Christ,
 And neither fears nor respects our gods.
 You should bring her back to reason,
 168 She who is unable to perceive our gods' virtue."
 The prefect answers: "Your advice is sound.
 I will submit her to my will
 To destroy her Christian faith.
 172 Whether she wants it or not, I will force her to obey me."
 At this, the prefect returns to his house.
 His decision is not a wise one,
 Yet he hastens to accomplish it
 176 Since he trusts his ability to dominate her.
 He summons his servants and tells them:
 "Go and do as I say:
 Bring this maiden before me,
 180 For she has despised the gods of our faith."
 These evil men obey.
 They display their wickedness
 In the joyous manner with which they undertake
 184 To go and fetch the maiden.
 They find her father and notify him:
 "The prefect has summoned your daughter,
 Since she has insulted the gods
 188 And refuses to submit to them."
 The father was a rich and powerful man,
 Most learned and wise.
 But he did not dare defend his daughter
 192 For fear of being identified as a Christian.
 Because in those days Christians were condemned
 And hated by the pagans more than anything else.
 When the pagans found them, through traps or spying,
 196 They put the Christians to death.
 The father called his daughter and gently prepared her.
 Willingly or not, he gave her to the soldiers.
 He went with her, not daring to flee,
 200 And came before the prefect to present her.
 The prefect saw that the maiden was most beautiful,
 And fairer than the fairest flower.
 "It is a pity," he said, "that this young girl
 204 Does not want to come to reason."
 He then proceeds to talk of his son's desire to marry her
 And promises her much honor and much wealth.

- But the maiden remains firm
 208 And refuses to agree, whether he likes it or not.
 The prefect realizes that he cannot convince her
 And that her father is not about to force her
 On account of his own nobility and pride.
 212 But he attempts to challenge her faith.
 The father departs and leaves his daughter.
 But she feels no fear at all,
 Only joy and happiness
 216 At the idea that she will resist the tyrant.
 He undertakes to conquer her through crafty words:
 "Agnes, why do you blaspheme our gods?
 I advise you to recant
 220 And to serve them from now on.
 Our gods are powerful and most capable
 Of punishing those who offend them.
 You must offer them a sacrifice
 224 To keep them from punishing you."
 To which the maiden replies:
 "Lord prefect, you have too many gods.
 They should all be burned, so evil are they.
 228 In trusting them, you show no wisdom.
 You say that they are powerful gods,
 But in fact they were once bad men on earth,
 Intent only on doing evil things,
 232 Full of wickedness and cruelty.
 [. . .]⁶
 269 "You will have no gain from adoring them.
 You can implore them all day long
 And ask for their mercy. You will not be heard,
 272 Because their mind is asleep.
 And it is not surprising if they cannot hear,
 Or see, since they have no eyes.
 Whoever believes in them
 276 Is ill advised and foolish.
 [. . .]
 281 "Our God is true, yours are false.
 Our God hears and sees our good or evil deeds.
 Whoever serves Him, does not do so in vain,
 284 But is assured of His protection.
 This is why I offered Him my virginity
 As the virtue which He likes above all.
 I want to keep my body chaste
 288 And thus to acquire His friendship."
 [. . .]
 297 The prefect answers: "Your young age is visible

- In that you are not yet quite wise.
 This is why I have listened to your abusive words
 300 Without getting angry or offended.
 But I do pity you and lament for you,
 Seeing your vanity.
 Recant and pray our gods humbly,
 304 And they will forgive you.
 And if it is your desire
 To live chastely,
 Let us go now to the temple of the goddess
 308 Where virgins spend their life.
 There, you will pray to her
 That she take you under her protection.
 You will sacrifice to her
 312 And your sins will thus be forgiven.”
 Agnes says at once:
 “You want me to go before a piece of stone,
 And pray to it?
 316 This would be a most stupid act!”

(Hearing her, the prefect becomes enraged.)⁷

- 325 “Come forward and offer yourself
 To the goddess, and make a sacrifice.
 If you do not devote yourself to her service,
 328 I will have you thrown in jail.
 There, you will find much discomfort
 And your lineage will be shamed.
 And then we will see how feeble is the power
 332 Of this Jesus to whom you gave your trust.”
 Agnes answers: “I do not fear your threat,
 Because your only motivation
 Is to convince me to abandon my God.
 336 But I will never do anything that might anger Him.”
 The prefect feels anger and ire,
 Realizing that he cannot master the debate.
 He orders that she be disrobed.
 340 The servants begin to take her garment away.
 She is now without clothes,
 And, seeing herself naked,
 Fair Agnes feels anguish and shame:
 344 “God,” she says, “come to my aid!”
 And God then shows His power
 In that her hair begins to grow,
 So much so that it covers her to her feet
 348 And hides her nakedness.

(The prefect then tells his men:)

- 353 "Come forward, all of my companions:
Take her to the bordello.
Young boys and lads will also go
356 And do with her whatever pleases them."
[. . .]
- 361 As she was brought into this evil place,
An angel came down from Heaven
And gave her a beautiful white mantle,
Made all in one piece without any seams.
[. . .]
- 385 And the bordello was suddenly filled with light,
And brighter than a summer day;
And this place of perdition
392 Became a place of prayers.
Indeed, when the lads entered this house
And saw the light, they felt such fear
That instead of satisfying their desire
396 They began to praise God.
Seeing this, the prefect's son,
Who had fallen in love with the maiden,
Began to mock his companions
400 And to blame them for their cowardice:
"You are really not worth much
If you let yourselves be frightened by a mere child.
But I will feel dishonored
404 If I do not satisfy my pleasure with her."

(Entering the house, he attempts to touch the maiden; as he is about to put his hand on her, he suddenly falls to the ground and dies. News of his son's death reaches the prefect.)

- 437 Arriving at the bordello, he sees his son on the ground.
Weeping, crying, he mourns his lost son.
He summons Agnes before him
440 And accuses her of his son's death:
"Cruel woman, how dare you
Kill my son through your witchcraft?
I will have you die a shameful death
444 And will have your spirit leave your body."
Agnes replied: "You are the lord prefect.
You had your say, I will now have mine.
Know that it is against the law of our creed
448 To kill anyone, man or woman."

(Agnes proceeds to praise God for having protected her from shame at the bordello.)

- 473 "God's angel protected me,
On account of my faith in Him.
I will always serve Him,
476 As I have done since my childhood."
The prefect says: "I am distressed and anguished
By the loss of my son.
Should you give him back to me, through the power of your god,
480 I will love and recognize Him."
Agnes: "I will pray on your behalf
Although you do not deserve it.
I will do it to honor God
484 Before your people, whose mind is still asleep."
With these words, Agnes fell to her knees,
Looked up toward Heaven,
Cried and sighed,
488 And sweetly implored our Lord.

(Brought back to life, the young man recants and praises God. The prefect marvels at this miracle, and many Romans convert. But the pagan priests, annoyed to see their power thus diminished, insist that Agnes be punished as a sorceress.)

- 637 There was a place in Rome
Called an arena, where games were held.
It was there that the people would gather
640 At the times of celebration.
[. . .]
649 A fire is now built at the arena.
Many people grieve at this sight.
Ladies lament and maidens weep over
652 Agnes' fate.
[. . .]
665 But as Agnes is put into the fire
And surrounded by its flames,
These do not touch her
668 And are as soft as dew.

(Suddenly, the flames leap on the servants tending the fire and burn many of them. Seeing this, the pagan priests say:)

- 713 "Truly, only witchcraft
Can explain this happening!
The fire has left her unharmed

- 716 But has consumed many of our people.”
 Their bishop answers: “Hear me now!
 I will put her to death in public
 So as to protect the honor of our gods
 720 And to keep our faith alive.”
 A sword is then brought
 And thrust into her chest.
 She is covered with her own beautiful blood;
 724 Her soul leaves her body, and she dies.
 [. . .]
 733 These evil men abandon her body.
 Her father comes, along with his wife.
 They show no grief
 736 Because they know that she will be praised.
 They have her body taken away,
 Then richly prepared,
 Wrapped in a white shroud,
 740 And buried in great honor.

(Many Christians attempt to come to her tomb so as to venerate her, but the pagans prevent them from doing so by throwing stones at them. A maiden called Emerald defies the pagans and is stoned to death.)

- 785 Suddenly, a fire starts. A clap of thunder is heard,
 And a storm destroys much of the city,
 Lighting up the whole sky
 788 And killing many of the pagans.
 These became so frightened
 And so afraid of dying
 That they henceforth did not dare mistreat
 792 The servants of God.

(Christians come to visit Agnes' tomb in recognition of her sanctity.)

- 853 Much later, I believe,
 At the time when Constantine was king—
 The first emperor to convert to our faith—
 856 Something happened, which I will now tell you.
 This king had a daughter
 Most wise, beautiful and learned,
 But not yet converted to our religion.
 860 I will describe the vision she had.
 Her name was Constantina.
 She was very valiant of heart and honorable,
 But did not have good health
 864 And was often sick.

- 976 And you will enjoy eternal life.
 He who will have eternal life
 Will sit at a rich table and in the company of angels,
 At the place where joy is resolute and endless.
- 980 There is good, there evil is destroyed.
 He who wants to know this bliss
 Must serve God and remember God
 With all his heart and all his strength,
- 984 And abandon the vain world and its glory.

Version B

“D’une france pucele vos vuel dire et conter”

The second thirteenth-century version of the Agnes legend is preserved in a single manuscript.⁸ It is a poem of 680 Alexandrine rhyming lines grouped in ten-line stanzas. The manuscript contains an entry written by one Gillebiers, a monk at the Saint Remi abbey at Rheims, who could be either the author or the copyist. Based on an allusion to the Renart fabliau in one of the other Saints’ Lives also contained in the manuscript, the editor dates *Agnes B* around the year 1288.⁹

Agnes B closely follows the Latin *Gesta Sanctae Agnes* in the order of events, as well as in their extension, except for several didactic interpolations that praise the virtue of virginity and reduce the dramatic impact of the legend as narrated by the author of *Agnes A*.

Summary

I want to tell you the story of a maiden whose name you have heard mentioned in the Holy Scriptures, in order to show you the way she rejected the world. May she be an example to you, noble men, and you maidens. She was but in her thirteenth year when she decided to leave the world and to endure martyrdom so as to be united with Christ. (ll. 1–10)

She was born in Rome of a noble lineage, and her beauty and good manners were admired by everyone in town and in the country. But she despised vanity, for she had been baptized and raised in the Christian faith, at a time when Rome was pagan and engaged in persecuting the Christians. It was an evil time indeed, and Symphronius, a Roman prefect, was a declared enemy of God. He had a son, who was also a pagan. (ll. 11–40)

One day as she is walking to school, Agnes is noticed by the prefect's son for her beauty. He falls in love and makes known to her his desire to marry her, with promises of riches for her parents. Agnes refuses his offer, arguing that she loves another man, so handsome and noble that the sun pales in comparison. He is not a mortal man, and once married, they will both remain chaste. The young man cannot forget her and falls ill. The prefect promises his son that he will succeed in giving him the maiden within three days. (ll. 41–148)

Agnes, however, refuses Symphronius' offers. One servant reveals to him that she is a Christian and has devoted her life to Christ. The prefect strives to change her disposition: if she wants to remain chaste, she can become a vestal. Agnes refuses with disdain, denounces the pagan idols and declares that God will protect her virginity. (ll. 149–250)

She is disrobed, to the crowd's great pleasure, but God takes pity on her: her hair grows miraculously and hides her nudity. She is then taken to the house of prostitution; an angel covers her with a mantle and the light emanating from her frightens the young men away, except for the prefect's son who makes fun of his friends' cowardice and rushes to the maiden. He falls dead to the ground. The crowd asks that Agnes be hanged. At this point in the narrative, the poet adds a prayer praising God and denouncing the evil of wealth. Symphronius now begs her to give him back his son, promising to convert if she does so. The young man is resurrected and converts, but the pagan priests, afraid of losing their power and being impoverished, accuse Agnes of being a sorceress: she deserves to die. Against his will, Symphronius complies with their wish. (ll. 251–410)

The flames of the stake spare Agnes and burn many onlookers. Some pagans in the crowd recognize Agnes' innocence, but she begs God to let her die, for nothing in this world can satisfy her soul. She is beheaded, and her body is venerated day and night by the Christians, until the pagans forbid them to go to the tomb. However, one Emerentiana refuses to obey and is stoned to death. From then on, the Christians are allowed to honor the holy maiden, who appears to her parents and describes to them the glory of Heaven. The news reaches Constantina, the emperor's daughter, who decides to visit Agnes' tomb in order to be healed from the ailment that torments her. In a vision, Agnes reveals to her that she will be cured. Constantina then decides to devote her life to the service of God, while her father, happy to see his daughter cured, agrees to have a chapel built, lets her be baptized, and finally converts. The whole city of Rome—Sylvester was then the Pope—also becomes Christian. Many Roman ladies join Constantina and live in an abbey where Agnes is honored and served. May God grant us eternal life through her intercessions. (ll. 411–680)

The Life of Saint Barbara

“Qui a talent de Dieu servir”

This Life, a 512-line poem written in octosyllabic rhyming couplets, is contained in a single manuscript copied between the years 1428 and 1429 by one Jehan Vagus.¹⁰ Composed in the district of Hainault at the end of the thirteenth century, the poem was probably inspired by Jacobus de Voragine’s rendition of the story of Saint Barbara in his *Golden Legend*.¹¹

Little is known about the facts of Barbara’s life, but her legend grew steadily, from the early martyrologies to the tenth-century compilation of Simeon Metaphrastes, a version which Jacobus de Voragine expanded.¹² Her cult started in the East, and Barbara was the patron saint of a monastery at Edessa in the fourth century. It then spread to Egypt, to Italy, and finally reached northern France and what is now Belgium through “the transference of her relics in 985 from Rome to Ghent.”¹³ During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Barbara became popular in Normandy.¹⁴ Until the sixteenth century, her cult remained particularly strong in northern, northeastern, and eastern France.¹⁵

Iconographic representations focus on her tortures as well as on the punishment endured by her father and by the evil shepherd.¹⁶

- He who desires to serve God,
Let him approach and listen to me!
I want to tell a new kind of story,
4 Never heard before.
Know that it does not concern Ogier,
Nor Roland, nor Olivier,
But a most holy maiden
8 Who was very courteous and beautiful.
The light emanating from her face was such
That no cleric, however learned,
Could even start to pay it tribute.
12 But I want to try to do my best.
Her hair was incredibly blond.
Her face, mouth and nose, perfectly formed,
Her complexion, high in color.

- 16 She was indeed most beautiful.
 My words are too poor
 To describe such beauty.
 Now listen, and may God protect you!
 20 The name of this maiden was Barbara.
 Her father was called Dyoscorus,
 But I do not know the name of her mother.
 Dyoscorus was a very noble man,
 24 And very powerful.
 He had many servants and vassals
 Serving him in his palace.
 He was a pagan and an unbeliever,
 28 But his daughter believed in God,
 In the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
 She also deeply believed
 In the Virgin Mary
 32 Whom she loved with all her heart.
 She believed in the Ten Commandments,
 As well as in the sacraments.
 She would meditate every day,
 36 And every time she found herself alone.
 Now hear about the maiden
 Who was so courteous and beautiful.
 Many high personages
 40 —Because of her beauty, I believe—
 Were eager to marry her,
 And to endow her richly.
 Her father would not grant their request,
 44 Neither refusing it, nor contesting it.
 Finally calling his daughter,
 He asked her of her desire
 Concerning these men's requests,
 48 And what she intended to do.
 Perturbed by his question,
 Saint Barbara—God's spouse—
 Answered him daringly
 52 That she cared for none of these suitors:
 "Father," she said, "in the name of love,
 Protect me from this ordeal.
 I am still an adolescent.
 56 Let us wait for the proper time."
 When Dyoscorus discovered
 That she would have no part of the suitors,
 He felt pained and surprised.
 60 Leaving her at once,
 He ordered a castle to be prepared

- So as to protect his daughter.
 He was not inspired by vengeance
 64 But by the desire to keep her from being stolen,
 On account of her great beauty
 And attractiveness.
 A little while later,
 68 An idea came to his mind.
 He summoned his masons,
 Telling them to come at once,
 In great haste, without delay.
 72 He now orders all of his workers
 To build a bathhouse in this manner:
 "You will build it in such a way
 That two windows will look eastward
 76 And that the floor will be of marble."
 "Masters," he adds, "do this work
 And your accomplishment will be great.
 Work as best as you can
 80 No matter the expenses in gold or silver.
 Another concern preoccupies me,
 And I must go away to take care of it.
 Meanwhile, start your work
 84 And keep your minds on it.
 I must leave the country,
 Unsure whether I will return.
 But if I do, I will ask my daughter
 88 And will thus know if you made any mistakes."
 He then visited his daughter
 To comfort her before leaving.
 He asked her to care for his project,
 92 Not to forget it,
 And to go, many times a week,
 To see how the work was progressing.
 And the time came for him to go,
 96 To which foreign country I do not know.
 He left Barbara behind,
 His daughter and God's servant.
 The maiden came to the bathhouse:
 100 "Masters," she says, "may the King of glory
 Be with you, and you with Him,
 To protect you from any trouble.
 You are so strong and so sturdy
 104 That there is nothing I can do to help you."
 Each of the masons salutes her
 As he had been shown and taught.
 The masters welcome with great respect

- 108 Saint Barbara, their mistress.
 "Lords," she tells them, "listen to me!
 You have made one mistake.
 You have built this bathhouse
- 112 In a way that cannot please God:
 You have thought of only two eastward windows,
 And these are meaningless in the absence of a third one.
 I now ask you to build a third one.
- 116 Know that this is most proper."
 The masons answer her:
 "Lady, we will obey readily,
 But know for a certainty
- 120 That your father will not be pleased,
 For he had ordered us to build
 Only two windows in all."
 The holy maiden answered them:
- 124 "Lords, if my father ever scolds you for this,
 Be sure to tell him I asked you to do so.
 I am the cause of this change."
 The masters have done as told
- 128 And have built three eastward windows.
 Saint Barbara, God's friend,
 Now blesses the marble pavement,
 In the direction of the east, tracing with one of her fingers
- 132 The cross of Jesus Christ.
 And the cross remains imprinted on the stone
 Like a branding into flesh.
 Everyone of the visitors could see this mark,
- 136 Who would come daily to see her.
 And whoever entered the pool
 Found it to be a source of healing:
 All the sick were cured,
- 140 All the blind could see.
 From the original pool,
 A spring gushed forth.
 Saint John came to the country
- 144 —Saint John the Baptist, God's servant—
 And baptized the maiden
 Who was now filled with the Holy Spirit.
 As she was returning home
- 148 And approaching the tower,
 She destroyed her father's gods,
 Throwing them down and mocking them.
 And then she said to herself:
- 152 "May this be the fate of all false gods like you!"
 From his journey, Dyoscorus

- Has come back to his project.
 He sees the three eastward windows,
 156 And calls for his masons.
 "Men," he says, "what have you done?
 You have acted against my will.
 You have built three windows
 160 Instead of the two I had requested."
 The masons all replied:
 "Lord, hear our explanation.
 It is your daughter who ordered it
 164 And asked us to contravene your will."
 He then asked for his daughter
 To inquire about her request.
 "Father," she says, "I was right,
 168 For two windows would not pay just tribute:
 They could not let enough light in.
 But three resemble the Trinity.
 As you can see for yourself,
 172 This whole place is all lighted,
 Thanks to these three windows:
 So the heavenly King wishes it.
 He has given us to adore
 176 His holiness through three Persons.
 I will now tell you their names:
 As I know and as I believe,
 They are the Father, the Son,
 180 And the Holy Spirit."
 Hearing this, Dyoscorus
 Grasped his sword, outraged.
 He was still in arms,
 184 Having just come back
 From his long journey.
 Anger overcame him.
 He wanted to kill the maiden.
 188 But God's grace kept him from doing so.
 Before the people there gathered,
 The stone where she was standing
 Suddenly takes her away
 192 And carries her to the top of a hill.
 In these fields, there were two shepherds
 Tending their lambs and sheep.
 The evil man ran after his daughter
 196 And asked them of her whereabouts.
 One stays silent, the other says:
 "Here she is, lord, on this hill."
 The maiden cursed the shepherd,

- 200 Who found himself at once punished,
 As his sheep turned into wolves.
 Such was the will of the heavenly King.
 Near the tomb of the maiden
 204 —Of Saint Barbara, the young girl—
 These wolves are still to be seen
 Running around.
 Since the day they appeared, they remain there
 208 And will always be present.
 Dyoscorus runs toward her,
 Seeing his daughter praying.
 He now beats her, the evil man,
 212 The mad one, the excommunicated.
 He then drags her down the hill,
 Pulling her by her blond hair.
 He has her locked in a jail,
 216 Saint Barbara, God's spouse.
 He keeps her there without food,
 Comfort, or solace.
 He then goes to the city's prefect
 220 To tell him about his daughter:
 "Come with me," he says, "at once!
 My daughter has betrayed our gods.
 She now believes in the one who was condemned,
 224 Hung on and nailed to a cross."
 The prefect hastens to come,
 And starts a trial.
 He summons the maiden:
 228 "Where is," he says, "this mad person?"
 "In jail," answers the father.
 The prefect replies angrily:
 "Bring her before me!
 232 In the name of the gods in whom I believe
 I will put her to a shameful death
 If she refuses to follow our law."
 Dyoscorus has her brought,
 236 And gives her to the prefect.
 The prefect starts reasoning with her,
 Making her all sorts of promises:
 "Fair maiden," he says, "listen to me.
 240 If you recant your error,
 I will make you a rich woman
 And will marry you to some most noble man."
 "Prefect," she says, "say no more!
 244 My husband is better than you.
 He has all the gold and silver in the world,

- And does with us as He pleases.
 He created the sky, the earth,
 248 Everything, including the fish and the birds.
 But your gods are nothing but devils.
 They have neither strength nor force,
 They can neither harm nor help us,
 252 And cannot avenge themselves.
 I have destroyed my father's gods,
 I will not desert God for their kind of 'power'.
 The evil man becomes enraged.
 256 He has the maiden bound,
 Then orders that she be disrobed,
 Whipped with heavy lashes,
 And clothed with a hair shirt
 260 Tied closely to her body.
 From all the wounds of her body,
 The blood pours out.
 But the maiden, the precious gem,
 264 Only loves God ever more.
 The prefect has her thrown into a jail
 —Saint Barbara, the worthy jewel.
 "Men," he says, "watch her carefully.
 268 I tell you,
 I want to devise and to concoct
 The best way to torture her to death."
 At midnight, the King of glory
 272 Came to her jail, through its closed door.
 He comes to see His friend
 And to give her comfort.
 All at once, the cell
 276 Is filled with a sweet fragrance.
 "Fair lady," God says, "be strong,
 I have opened the door of Heaven for you.
 Now hear my words
 280 Which you must trust and believe:
 I am your God, I am your Lord,
 I am Jesus, Mary's Son.
 I celebrate and honor your torments:
 284 This is the truth."
 He now cures her whole body
 —Which has suffered cruel tortures—
 And promises her His company
 288 If her faith remains firm until her death.
 He traces the sign of the cross on her forehead,
 And gives her His blessing.
 Going back to Heaven, He leaves
 292 The most honorable maiden.

- The following day, Martianus
 Presides over the cruel trial.
 He summons the maiden
 296 In order to give his judgment.
 He notices that she is healed.
 "Tell me," he says, "who has cured you
 Of your wounds and sores?
 300 Tell me who has taken care of you."
 The girl answers: "Jesus Christ,
 The Creator of the whole universe,
 The Son of the Virgin Mary,
 304 Came last night and cured me,
 Bringing me solace and comfort.
 He healed me from my pains.
 In Him I believe and will always believe.
 308 I will remain faithful to Him.
 I will try to serve Him
 And death will not hinder my pledge."
 Martianus becomes enraged.
 312 He orders that she be tortured
 And that her sides be torn
 With sharp iron teeth.
 Burning lamps are then applied
 316 All over her body.
 Her head is now beaten,
 At this evil man's command.
 The maiden looks up to Heaven,
 320 Calling Our Lord:
 "Lord," she says, "please hear me.
 I endure these tortures in Your name.
 You are—my Lord—my comfort,
 324 My solace, and my joy.
 Assist me, Sire, help me endure
 And keep me from becoming weak.
 I have put my faith in You,
 328 And in Your high power."
 The tyrant has now ordered
 That her hands and feet be bound.
 At his command, the maiden's breast
 332 Is severed by a sword.

(Barbara prays to God that people remembering her name may be protected and redeemed, in the name of her sacrifice.)

- 358 A voice answers her from Heaven:
 "My fair spouse, sweet friend,
 360 Have no fear about your request.

- I am more than willing
 To grant what you are asking.
 I will protect
 364 All those who commemorate you.
 He who will fast before your feast-day
 Will be kept out of danger.”
 The maiden now presents her neck
 368 And her evil father strikes her.
 He cuts off her head
 With a very sharp sword.
 Indeed, what a terrible deed,
 372 For a father to kill his daughter!
 Dyoscorus climbs down from the hill
 And sees a fire descending toward him.
 This fire has been sent from Heaven
 376 In pursuit of this evil man.
 [. . .]
 387 Through the merits of God’s friend
 388 —Of Saint Barbara, the worthy martyr—
 Many miracles occurred:
 Deformed people were cured,
 Many dead came back to life
 392 And the blind saw again.

(Barbara’s merits are now compared to those of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, Saint Agnes, Saint Agatha, and Saint Margaret.)

- 437 Listen now to a great miracle.
 In the name of God and Saint Barbara,
 I will tell you about a knight
 440 Who did very well.
 When he heard of Saint Barbara,
 He started to love her
 And to invoke her name.
 444 He would fast before each of her feast-days.
 He once asked her to help him repent
 And to enlighten him,
 As he was engaged in a cruel war
 448 And did not know to which land
 He should go to end his life.
 For this, he prayed to her at length.
 A while later, the time came
 452 When disorder prevailed.
 The knight could find neither rest nor peace.
 One day, he was riding peacefully
 Along his fields

- 456 To see how they were growing.
 His enemies saw him,
 Began to chase him,
 And cut off his head
 460 With great joy and great violence.
 Now severed from his body,
 The head calls out for the chapel's priest:
 "Come here, help me out,
 464 You who are allowed to hold my Creator.
 Bring me back to my body
 And give me communion."
 Now hear about this good priest.
 468 He at once joins the head to the body,
 And then asks the man,
 For he was a wise and learned priest:
 "What is the meaning of this miracle?
 472 Tell me, I beg of you,
 Reveal to me, if you please,
 The truth about this affair."
 And the knight answers him:
 476 "Lord," he says, "I will tell you.
 There is a maiden in Paradise,
 Whose faithful friend I am.
 I have always loved her,
 480 And have always fasted on the eve of her feast-day.
 Her name is Saint Barbara,
 My long-time protector.
 I once prayed her to help me repent
 484 And to show me how to end my life.
 She then addressed a prayer
 To the King of Heaven, who loves her dearly.
 In the name of her love and betrothal to Him,
 488 She addressed
 Him who had granted her request
 When her father beheaded her.
 Her merits will save many.
 492 This is the whole truth."
 The knight now confesses
 Very devoutly
 To Our Lord's priest,
 496 With much joy.
 Then his soul departs.
 He is thus amended through God's love.
 A mass is sung for the knight's soul,
 500 And the war ends.
 This is why I tell you now

- That everyone should pray to this holy maiden
 So as to be protected from danger,
 504 Thanks to Jesus, Mary's Son.
 Now let us pray to the maiden
 —To Saint Barbara, God's servant—
 That she may pray to our Creator
 508 To give us joy and honor.
 We must accomplish good deeds
 If we want to reach
 And to enter Paradise.
 512 Let us say "Amen" to be blessed by God.

The Life of Catherine of Alexandria

Version B

“Pour l'amitié de Jhesus Crist”

This version of the Saint Catherine legend comprises 1,971 octosyllabic lines in rhyming couplets. The text was for a long time thought to be contained in a single manuscript.¹⁷ An eighteenth-century copy analyzed by Meyer,¹⁸ this manuscript supposedly transcribed a “lost” original. Dembowski, however, recently identified the latter.¹⁹

The author gives his name (“Gui,” l. 1940), but no other details are known about him. At the beginning of the narrative (l. 19 ff.), Gui mentions a Norman version of the legend.²⁰

The origin of the Catherine legend remains conjectural. The main centers of her cult were the monastery of Mt. Sinai, Cyprus (allegedly her father’s kingdom), and Venice.²¹ Fragments of her relics were possibly transferred to the Benedictine monastery of La-Trinité-au-Mont in Rouen during the eleventh century. She was also venerated in Paris and Touraine.

Her legend inspired numerous authors in the Latin tradition.²² The legend eventually flourished in the vernacular. According to Manger,²³ the Latin *Vulgata* of the mid-eleventh century is the source of *Catherine A*, *B*, and *C*.

Réau traces an interesting evolution in the iconographic history of the Catherine legend.²⁴ The traditional circle representing the wheel of torture was probably meant at first to depict a sphere of science, in reference to Catherine’s intellectual victory. The circle was afterward taken for a symbolic wedding ring. Such a thematic change does not appear in art before the fifteenth century. Visual illustrations of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries indeed focus on the episodes most representative of Catherine’s mental and physical stamina, such as the debate pitting her against the pagan philosophers, the conversion of the latter, the tortures endured by the saint, and her beheading. By contrast, hagiographic romance, *Catherine D* in particular, shows a marked tendency to intensify the vulnerability of the heroine.

- For the love of Jesus Christ,
 One must put into writing
 The accomplishments of His friends.
- 4 Among those who have undertaken
 To honor the saints,
 No one could deny having reaped benefits.
 The saints are like a pleasant vale
- 8 Leading to the mountain.
 Unsurpassed in the universe
 Is the One who is all virtues,
 All sweetness, and all goodness,
- 12 The Creator of the world.
 Out of love for this good Master,
 I want to recount the Life and achievement
 Of one of His friends,
- 16 And to translate her story from Latin into the French Language,
 In a way most pleasant to hear
 For its listeners.
 A cleric once translated it,
- 20 But since he was a Norman,
 The rhyme he used
 Was not pleasant to French ears.
 Thus, my friends have sent this story to me
- 24 So that I might adapt it into French.
 May God give me the power to do so!
 I trust
 That He will come to help me.
- 28 As I am about to begin, I pray to Him
 That He send me His Holy Spirit
 To inspire me to do well,
 And that my proposed endeavor
- 32 May reach its completion.
 I also pray to the maiden
 That she ask God, as His servant,
 To welcome in His eternal glory
- 36 All those who will remember her.
 Once upon a time, there was in Rome
 A very noble emperor
 By the name of Constantine,
- 40 Who was valiant, praiseworthy, and courtly.
 The son of the emperor Coutant,
 He loved the Holy Church so much
 That, as long as he governed the land,
- 44 Christianity suffered no war.

(Constantine decides to visit France, one of his estates, so as to propagate the Christian faith. In his absence, the empire is governed by the pagan Marcus, who

- Just as silver,
 When mixed with lead,
 192 Cannot be changed or altered
 But remains clean and bright,
 The maiden, untouched by the stain
 Of the world, stayed pure
 196 So that no one ever saw,
 On her part,
 Any display of pride or meanness.
 Everyone loved her deeply
 200 And honored her.
 One day, greatly dismayed
 By the noise she was hearing
 From her window,
 204 The maiden wondered what was happening.
 She was told the reason for this disturbance.
 She gets up at once
 To go to Marcus and his men.
 208 She runs to the place where the tyrant
 Was forcing people to adore the idols,
 And sees there, weeping,
 Christians who wanted, wrongly so,
 212 And out of their fear of death,
 To leave Jesus Christ and His law,
 And to adore, wrongly so,
 The gods made of copper.
 216 They were abandoning
 Him who is all truth because of their fear.
 The maiden bows her head
 As if angered and dismayed,
 220 And starts praying to God at once,
 Humbly, but in a clear and loud voice.
 She then crosses herself,
 Stands up boldly,
 224 And addresses the tyrant:
 "Emperor," says the maiden,
 "I call upon your honor
 And the dignity of your function.
 228 I salute you—whether you want it or not—
 As one must do one's emperor.
 Instead of offering all this service and honor
 To these images,
 232 You should, as a wise man,
 Offer them to the King, to the Master,
 To God who created you,
 To God thanks to whom you govern,

- 236 To Him who elects the leaders,
 And by whom the natural elements
 Were first conceived.
 He does not care for beastly people.
 240 But when He perceives the faithfulness
 Of those who serve him in their deeds and words,
 He loves them and comes to them.
 This kind of love pleases Him.
 244 It is the abode where He settles.
 One cannot displease God more
 Than by leaving Him and keeping away from Him.
 God disapproves of the service
 248 Of one who behaves in an evil way,
 And who, acting against nature,
 Chooses to serve divinities other
 Than Him who created everything.
 252 This is indeed a fearsome deed.
 There is only one God: know this for a certainty.
 To honor more than one is madness."
 While the maiden was talking,
 256 The king listened to the speech
 That she was delivering so well.
 He saw the brightness of her face,
 A brightness he had never seen before.
 260 Her face, her body and her eyes,
 Were the objects of his gaze.
 Looking at her closely,
 He saw nothing in her appearance
 264 That was deceiving or misleading,
 For the maiden was beautiful indeed.
 He answers her: "Fair maiden,
 I know nothing of your name,
 268 Whether you are young or not,
 Except that you are whiter than snow.
 I do not know your father,
 Nor the name of your master.
 272 But your merits clearly point
 To a noble lineage.
 And your speech is so enlightened
 That they were undoubtedly learned,
 276 The clerics who trained you.
 But it is no less clear that you err,
 And that you were taught wrongly
 About our very powerful gods.
 280 I consider your speech as child's talk."
 The maiden answers him,

- And tells him what he wants to know:
 “King, my name is Catherine.
 284 I am the daughter of a king and a queen.
 King Constantius was my father.
 And if you ask me, Emperor,
 About my family and lineage,
 288 Know that their fame was great,
 In a worldly perspective.
 But insofar as the world can give me
 Nothing except vainglory,
 292 I lost the memory of my name
 As soon as I received the light
 Of Jesus Christ—when His virtue
 Enlightened me
 296 And cast away the vain thoughts
 That I had learned since childhood—
 Through the path of wisdom.
 I then turned my mind to the Scriptures
 300 Which introduced me to Jesus Christ.
 I listened to the lesson of the Gospels,
 Which says, without deceit or falsity,
 ‘Anger destroys all around
 304 The wisdom of the world.’
 David, our good master, also says
 That God is in Heaven: there is His being,
 Whence He does as He pleases.
 308 Foolish is he who does not believe in Him.
 But the gods that your people adore
 Are handmade out of gold and silver.
 They are not gods, but devils
 312 That belong to Hell.
 Your honoring them is foolish.
 King, your behavior is ill conceived.
 And if you want, through your threats,
 316 To convince me to honor them,
 Show me first their power.
 Since they have a human appearance,
 Their eyes should see,
 320 Their ears should hear,
 Their mouths should talk,
 Their hands should grasp and their feet move.
 Otherwise, it is proof
 324 That those who honor these gods
 Are indeed of little wisdom,
 And that these gods have even less power
 Than those who honor them.

- 328 Lord God, they act against You,
 Those who abandon You and honor
 Gods that cannot hear or help themselves,
 That have neither power nor value,
 332 And feel neither the cold nor the heat.
 King, these gods that you adore
 Have no power and no virtue.”
 The emperor greatly wonders,
 336 And marvels, hearing the words
 That the maiden has uttered.
 “I can only despise [he replied to her]
 Everything you have said.
 340 But I am very impressed
 By your talent and eloquence.
 Had you, since childhood,
 Been taught by our good masters,
 344 You would not have to refer
 To some master that no one can find,
 Either here or in any other country.
 And you would honor
 348 The gods that you now blame and despise.
 I cannot listen to you any more,
 But I am willing to wait
 Until you do as I wish.
 352 In due time,
 You will come to my palace.
 If you want me to praise you
 And to give you honorable gifts,
 356 You must abandon your foolish beliefs
 And beg for our gods’ mercy.
 Take her away,” he says,
 “And keep her until I ask for her.
 360 And watch her most carefully.”
 The maiden is held under close watch.
 The emperor now summons a cleric
 And orders him to write a letter.
 364 This letter requires him to search
 For the best philosophers in the world,
 The wisest that anyone can find.
 They are to come to Alexandria,
 368 As the emperor needs their advice
 Regarding a certain matter.
 If they can find a solution,
 Great will be their reward.
 372 With honor and rich gifts
 He will give them leave.

- Such was the content of the letter.
 When it was written,
 376 The emperor sealed it
 With the stone of his ring.
 The messenger is at a loss,
 Not knowing how to fulfill his task.
 380 He travels far and wide,
 Crosses many seas, and visits many lands,
 Until he finally finds what he seeks.
 He brings back with him many wise men,
 384 The most learned clerics of the whole empire,
 Whose knowledge was all-encompassing.
 He brings them before the king
 Who receives them very well.
 386 Having welcomed them,
 The king invites them to his court.
 He then begins to question them
 About their belief and faith.
 392 They do not waver,
 But show through their answers
 That they are indeed most learned.
 Their responses are filled with wisdom.
 396 When the king hears them, he marvels.
 "Emperor, what is your purpose?"
 They all ask him.
 "Why do you need us?"
 400 You have called us from afar
 On account of a serious matter, certainly.
 And we will undoubtedly know
 How to advise you, if you ask us.
 404 [Line missing in the manuscript.]
 No one could confound us.
 We can win in any debate."
 The king answers without delay:
 408 "I have a maiden, under guard,
 Beautiful and young in age,
 But so wise and learned
 That she is superior to the best clerics
 412 And can dominate and shame them
 In such a way that any challenger
 Is certain to be confounded by her.
 She speaks and reasons well,
 416 But errs greatly
 In that she hates and despises our gods
 And refuses their law.
 And she does even worse:

- 420 Because I ridiculed her God,
 She called our own gods devils.
 Her arguments cannot be endured
 And we must force her
 424 To sacrifice to our gods,
 Or else she will be tortured to death.
 But she will act more prudently
 If she lets herself be convinced by you,
 428 Recognizes her error,
 And agrees to sacrifice to our gods,
 Whom she holds for false and perishable.
 But if she persists in her madness
 432 And refuses to recant,
 I will, without hesitation,
 Make her suffer till death comes.
 And I tell you at once
 436 That if you succeed in converting her
 And in confusing her,
 You will be greatly rewarded.
 There is no request of yours
 440 That I will not try to satisfy.
 Or if you desired to join me,
 You would become my close advisors.”
 Some of the philosophers react angrily,
 444 Saying to their companions: “Lords, listen: it appears that our
 king
 Had us study in vain
 —Getting up early and staying up all night—
 If our wisdom is only to be tested
 448 Against a mere child whose only talent
 Is to mock people.
 The king had made us experts
 In the arts of reasoning and logic.
 452 Hearing his message
 Concerning his great need for us,
 We came here from afar.
 King, you mentioned a maiden.
 456 We will not break our promise,
 And want to confront her.
 Call for her, wherever she is,
 So that she might know for certain
 460 That she has never heard such wisdom
 From anyone alive, as she will hear today.
 King, we will do this for your sake, not for hers.
 For, as to confounding her,
 464 Any one of your soldiers could do it.”

(Hearing of the upcoming debate, Catherine remains unafraid. She asks God to assist her, and is told that she will win over her verbal opponents.)

- 543 The maiden has arrived at the king's court.
All the people hasten
To hear the debate.
- 546 The king asks the challengers
To start the verbal attack.
The maiden stands up at once
And says boldly:
- 550 "King, you have arranged
For fifty wise men to confront
Me and to try me.
You have them all on your side.
The sides are not equal,
- 554 Far from it. For in this battle²⁵
I am a young and guileless woman,
Deprived of any guide or protector.
If Jesus Christ does not think of me,
- 558 I will not be able to withstand their attack.
But what gives me assurance
Is that God promised me His counsel,
He in whom I have put my trust.
- 562 It came to my attention
That you made a pledge to pay my opponents,
Should they master me.
You must also promise me a gift.
- 566 I hereby ask of you that,
If I succeed in defeating them,
In the name of the Holy Scriptures,
You accept belief in Jesus Christ.
- 570 This is the promise and the gift I request,
And the reward I am asking."
The king answers at once:
"Fair friend, this kind of contract
- 574 Cannot and should not be offered by you.
Your belief does not interest me.
But we will soon see through your reasoning
Whether your God will be able to protect you."

(Catherine now invites her opponents to begin the discussion. Since they insist on hearing her first, Catherine starts expounding the arguments of her faith.)

- 600 "Since I renounced the foolish faith
Which is still yours,
And since I recanted the former error

- Which had been mine for so long,
 604 I have put my trust in God,
 Who is my friend.
 I have received faith
 From Jesus Christ in whom I believe.
- 608 I have loved Him since then,
 And He has loved me.
 Since then, I hate the books
 Whose company I used to seek,
- 612 And which I held so dear.
 My expertise was such
 That I surpassed
 All the clerics of this world.
- 616 I surpassed all my masters
 Because of the books I read.
 But, as I know now,
 All this science
- 620 Could not give me eternal life,
 Which I had hoped at first
 To attain through my studies.
 I determined at once
- 624 To forget everything
 I was once so anxious to learn,
 Knowing that this kind of knowledge is nothing but a lie.
 Toward God, whose name is Jesus Christ,
- 628 I turned my heart and my hope.
 And my only knowledge now
 Comes from God, who was born
 Man from man, and came into being
- 632 Through a sinless virgin.
 He suffered death and tortures
 Without justification,
 Knowing for a certainty
- 636 That death which came from the evil apple
 —Through which the Devil deceived man—
 Could only be conquered by human death.
 This is why God became man,
- 640 Taking our nature
 In the shape of a human being.
 His humility made visible
 The fact that He was God.
- 644 For he was God and man altogether.
 He is here, He is present,
 He is the one whom I trust,
 And the sum total of my philosophy.
- 648 His name and His memory

Are my joy and my victory.
 He will conquer all my enemies.
 This is what He promised me.”

(The fifty pagan scholars argue that it is impossible for anyone to die and to be resurrected. Both parties engage in a discussion concerning Christ’s both divine and human nature. One by one, the scholars acknowledge their defeat and the validity of Catherine’s reasoning. Infuriated by their conversion, Marcus orders that they all be burned at the stake. He then tries again to reason with Catherine.)

- 964 He turns toward her and says:
 “Alas, alas! Fair maiden,
 Try to be reasonable.
 When I saw you for the first time,
 968 I immediately pitied your youth.
 I tried repeatedly
 To save you from tortures.
 Sweet maiden, help yourself
 972 And believe in our gods; sacrifice to them.
 Foolish is he who does not trust them.
 If you do as I ask
 And sacrifice to them,
 976 I will take good care of you,
 Treating you as dearly
 As I would a queen.
 You will be greatly honored
 980 By my people. My land and my possessions
 Will all be yours.”
 The maiden laughed,
 And answered him with these truthful words:
 984 “Emperor, end here your speech.
 Do not attempt
 To make me commit such a vile deed.
 Jesus Christ, whose friend I am,
 988 Has taken me for His spouse.
 It is He whom my heart loves.
 He is my pleasure and my joy,
 And there is nothing I cherish more
 992 Than His companionship.
 For Him, I will vigilantly
 Preserve my virginity.
 I fear none of the tortures
 996 That you might make me endure.
 No torments could keep me
 From serving and loving God,
 And from praying to Him and calling Him.”

- 1324 Combined with the torture of fasting,
 Was meant to force her to recant.
 The emperor stared at her.
 But it seemed to him that she was now
 1328 Even more beautiful than before.
 Thinking that she had been fed
 While in prison, he became angry
 At the fact that she looked so well.
 1332 He now orders that all her jailers
 Be taken and hanged,
 Unless they agree to reveal
 How the maiden had eaten,
 1336 And who had brought her food.

(Catherine takes their defense and explains that she has received divine sustenance. Once more, Marcus attempts to convince her to recant; and once again, she refuses. Cursate, the city prefect, invents an instrument of torture: Catherine will be attached to the center of four turning wheels, each equipped with blades.)

- 1462 Carpenters are called.
 They work daily on the machine,
 Which is soon ready.
 It is set in the middle of the hall,
 1466 With its iron blades.
 The high and the lowly
 Have gathered around.
 Great are the tumult
 1470 And the noise of the crowd,
 On account of the fear and anguish
 Which makes everyone tremble.
 The king takes his place in the stand
 1474 And orders that
 The maiden, naked, be brought forth.
 Now disrobed,
 She is all ready and prepared
 1478 To face death
 In the name of Jesus Christ, if need be.
 She pays no heed to the instrument of torture.
 The torments and pain she endures
 1482 Do not affect her disposition.
 She turns her eyes toward Heaven,
 And softly says, praying privately
 To God in Heaven:
 [. . .]
 1500 "Lord, You know for certain
 That it is not the fear of torture

- That makes me ask You to grant me a request.
 For I am ready and willing
 1504 To suffer martyrdom,
 According to Your divine decision.
 But I am praying on behalf of these witnesses,
 That they may believe in You
 1508 And put their trust in You,
 Once they witness Your vengeance.”
 She has hardly uttered these words
 When Jesus, who loves her dearly,
 1512 Sends His vengeance.
 From the sky, at once,
 An angel hurls a tempest
 So strong and so fierce
 1516 That the machine of torture is destroyed
 And torn into many pieces.
 Fragments are then swept up
 —To the surprise of everyone—
 1520 And swirled about by the wind.
 Four thousand pieces are thus swung,
 Which are made of wood or of iron,
 As sharp as a skewer
 1524 And as pointed as splinters.
 On behalf of the maiden,
 These fragments fall upon those present.
 Brains are split open,
 1528 And four thousand pagans die.
 God avenged her in this manner.

(At this sight, many pagans convert, while the tyrant’s wife openly declares her faith in God.)

- 1566 When the tyrant sees this,
 Know that he does not rejoice,
 But that he feels hatred
 Toward the queen, his wife.
 1570 Addressing her, he says:
 “What are you saying, queen?
 What are you now boasting?
 The Christians have bewitched you!
 1574 But I swear on my great gods
 That if you persist
 And do not give up this foolishness,
 I will make you suffer
 1578 And will order that you be beheaded.
 I will throw your corpse

To the animals and to the birds,
 Who will do their vile work.”
 1582 He now orders that she be taken
 And that her breasts
 Be pierced and pressed
 Between iron prongs, forcefully,
 1586 And that they be squeezed,
 Then pulled off.

(After the queen’s death, Porphire goes to Marcus and declares his faith in God.)

1668 Consumed by an evil rage, the tyrant,
 Who has behaved so vilely,
 Is now possessed by the Devil.
 He emits such a horrible shout
 1672 That the whole hall resounds.
 And he says: “Alas, cursed was the hour
 When I was born to this earth!
 Evil death, come, take me,
 1676 Since I have lost
 All those I loved in this world.”
 [. . .]
 1722 The following day, he is sitting
 —Both angered and anguished—
 In the marble room.
 He orders that Catherine
 1726 Be brought before him.
 He attempts to seduce her with these words:
 “Maiden, hear what I say,
 If you wish, without contesting me.
 1730 You are responsible for the death
 Of all those who have died here.
 You have bewitched them,
 And I tortured them because of you.
 1734 But if you agree to recant
 And to give up your mad faith
 In order to adore
 My powerful gods,
 1738 I will make you a queen.
 All the anger and hatred
 I harbor against you will be forgotten;
 And I will give you my kingdom.
 1742 Hasten to decide, without delay,
 And choose one of these two options:
 Either you will sacrifice to the gods,
 Or your head

- 1746 Will be severed from your body.
Your remains will be thrown to the dogs,
Outside, in the open,
For everyone to see.”
- 1750 “Emperor,” says the maiden,
“This death is sweet and good for me.
For it is not death, but life.
And I have no other desire
- 1754 Than to die for my Lord.
This is my greatest joy,
Since this ordeal will bring me bliss.
It will put an end to my suffering,
- 1758 And will lead me to eternal life and pure happiness.
I could not recount for you one tenth
Of the reasons explaining my joy.”

(The emperor orders that Catherine be taken outside the walls of Alexandria to be beheaded. The saint proceeds to praise Christ, her heavenly spouse.)

- 1807 “I see Christ in His Heaven,
Calling me and inviting me
To join Him on high.
- 1810 He is my Spouse, He is my Friend.
To Him I have given my heart.
He is my Husband and my Crown.
I have nothing but what He gives me.
- 1814 I am under His protection.
Be careful [she tells the emperor],
Lest Death, who despises everyone,
Take you by surprise,
- 1818 And lest, for the service of the Devil,
You lose eternal life.”

(Catherine then addresses to God the following prayer:)

- 1828 “Sweet Lord God, beautiful Father,
My Friend and my Emperor,
The Friend of Your friends on earth,
King, I want to honor
- 1832 Those who believe in You.
I want to glorify the virgins who trust You.
And may Jesus be praised
For inviting me, today,
- 1836 To live among the angels
In the company of the maidens
Who, in their fragile nature,

Have kept their virginity.
 1840 Lord, the Compassionate,
 Grant me my request:
 May all those who evoke
 My passion and my triumph
 1844 —In Your honor, my Lord,
 I ask You to grant me this—
 Be heard by You
 And receive Your assistance
 1848 In times of need,
 Evil, or adversity.”
 [. . .]
 1868 And now comes above her
 A beautiful dove
 Telling her these words:
 “Come, fair sister, come, sweet friend,
 1872 Come and ask for your heavenly reward!
 See how the door is open,
 The door of bliss.
 Come along, knowing
 1876 That your place is in Paradise,
 Which has been prepared for you.
 Angels are waiting for you,
 Who, at your command,
 1880 Will come and take you.
 As you can see, they are holding
 A crown of pure gold
 That I have taken from my treasure
 1884 And which will honor you.
 Come, you who were born to goodness!
 Fear not, dear friend,
 I have heard your prayer:
 1888 All those who will remember your ordeal,
 With a pure and humble heart,
 And who will call on you, my sweet friend,
 Will be heard.”

(The author now narrates the episode of Catherine's death.)

1902 The sword falls down, and her head
Flies down to the ground.
In recognition of her martyrdom,
Two events occurred, which are sweet to recount.
1906 One was that, instead of blood,
It was pure and white milk
That sprung from her wound.

- And know for certain
 1910 That this milk was indeed
 A symbol of her virginity.
 The other thing that happened
 Was that angels came to her body
 1914 Without delay,
 And carried her at once
 To Mount Sinai,
 Where God had given his Law
 1918 To Moses, the good prophet.
 [. . .]
 1923 There, many miracles occurred,
 But a marvel happened
 That many people came to see:
 1926 From her tomb, flowed
 An oil which cured many sick people.
 [. . .]
 1956 I now pray to her, that on the day of my death
 She give me an eternal gift.
 When the time comes for my soul to depart,
 May the devils not take it,
 1960 And may Satan not keep it.
 Asking for her guard and protection,
 I give my soul and my body
 To this virgin: such is my wish.
 1964 And may those who hear her passion
 Likewise offer themselves to her,
 In exchange for their request.
 May He who created the sky, the sea, and the earth,
 1968 And all that we can see and hold,
 Grant us to die a good death
 In His name, He, the eternal King
 Who has neither beginning nor end.

Version A

“De laisser les mauvais penser”

This version of the Catherine legend²⁶ comprises 2,332 octosyllabic lines in rhyming couplets.

A note concluding another poem in the same manuscript and written

by the same scribe allows Breuer, its editor, to date the manuscript to the year 1251.²⁷ Nothing else is known about the French text or its author.

Summary

To chase away evil thoughts, I seek righteous occupations of the mind. This is why I now decide to write a beautiful story, a true one indeed, which I read in a *Passionary* in Rome. It is about a saintly woman, whose passion and life I will now tell you, briefly, for the shorter, the better. (ll. 1–37)

It was a time of persecution, when the Roman emperor was sending the Christians to death in all parts of his kingdom. As my source says, there was in Africa a noble and powerful man named Cost, the pagan king of Alexandria. Catherine, his only daughter, was courtly in manners and knowledge. She could read Latin and Greek, play music, compose songs, and was extremely beautiful. She wanted to learn the Christian law, but her father forbade her to do so. On his deathbed, King Cost announces to Catherine that she is to marry the emperor. She readily agrees. (ll. 38–185)

In Alexandria, where Christians were traditionally numerous, there was a devout priest living in a remote church and to whom both Christians and pagans paid tribute. One day, Catherine comes to him. She wants him to help her find a good husband, one who could live long and not die at an early age, as was the case of her own father. The priest shows her a statue of the Virgin Mary holding Her Child, saying that She is married to a Husband who will never die, and that She will aid her if Catherine comes and prays to Her every day. Catherine follows the priest's advice. For a whole year, she kneels daily before the image. (186–329)

The time has arrived for the emperor, Maxence, to go to Alexandria. On his order, the wedding ceremony gets under way. Meanwhile, Catherine asks her mother to let her go to the chapel, for she wants to seek the Lady's advice concerning her marriage with Maxence. Once in the chapel, Catherine starts her prayers. Soon, the Queen of the world appears beside her and tells Catherine about the immortal Husband who is to be hers, revealing now His and Her identities. The Virgin Mary then entrusts the young girl to Saint Gabriel, who leads her soul to Heaven and names for her the angels and saints of the divine escort. Dazzled by the splendors of Paradise, Catherine knows at once that they are infinitely superior to Maxence's possessions. (ll. 330–1104)

After Catherine's soul has come back to her body, both mother and daughter return to the city. Two messengers inform them that, because of the delay caused by their expedition, the emperor has impatiently postponed the ceremony for the following morning. The queen eagerly pledges that her daughter will be ready, but Catherine remains silent, keeping from her mother her miraculous journey to Heaven and her decision not to marry Maxence. (ll. 1105–1244)

As the wedding ceremony gets under way, the emperor invites Catherine to sacrifice to the gods. Catherine refuses at once, derides in a lengthy speech the

emperor's belief, and claims to be God's spouse. Suddenly, lightning flashes down from Heaven and reduces the idols and their priests to ashes. Catherine then expounds the principles of the Christian faith, thus inciting many in the crowd to convert and to worship the Cross. Immediately, the emperor orders that these be burned, while Catherine is beaten and thrown into jail. The supernatural light and joy radiating from the jail convince over a thousand more people to convert. They are at once put to death. Meanwhile, Maxence marries Catherine's cousin, who visits Catherine in her prison. Charmed by the light and fragrances that pervade the room, the new queen learns about the eternal bliss of Heaven and decides, along with her three ladies in waiting, to renounce the world. A messenger, Porphyre, conveys to the emperor his and their decision to serve the true God. They are all immediately martyred. (ll. 1245–2078)

The following day, Maxence gathers his court. One of his barons advises him to destroy Catherine before she commits any more harm. Learning of her fate, Catherine prays to God that He may continue to aid her, for she has no strength without Him. The emperor has her taken outside the city to be beheaded. Half disrobed, she is then placed on a high platform whence all can see her. Catherine prays to God to grant her that whoever invokes her name be helped, for His love. Her head is then cut by the sword; not blood, but milk, flows from her body. The corpse is carried away by the angels to Mount Sinai, and a miraculous oil flows from the tomb. The author concludes his poem by exhorting all the listeners to pray to God, that He may welcome them in His kingdom. (ll. 2079–2332)

Version C

“... Pois a parlé cum hom irez”

This third version of the legend, which is preserved in a single manuscript,²⁸ comprises 2,663 octosyllabic lines in rhyming couplets. The manuscript comes from Marmoutiers (an abbey near Tours) and contains only the poem on Saint Catherine. Naudeau, its editor, dates *Catherine C* from the first half of the thirteenth century. According to Naudeau, who refutes the Poitou origins advanced by earlier scholars (Manger among others), the language of this Life shows many Provençal traits.

The poem is followed by 14 lines in Latin where the author gives his name, Aumeric, and location (Saint-Michel-en-l'Herm, near La Rochelle). Aumeric's probable source is the Latin *Vulgata* identified by Manger.

This version of the legend is incomplete and starts with the first confrontation between Catherine and the tyrant Maxence.

Summary

Maxence defends his own belief on the ground of tradition. In his view, the Christian doctrine proves itself to be contradictory: had he been a truly honest man, Christ would not have been crucified; one of his disciples even betrayed him. It is therefore madness to believe in his resurrection; it is very wise, however, to honor the sun and the moon. Catherine laughs at his words and explains that God is the Creator of both the sun and the moon. As for the idols, they are manmade, unworthy of worship. Maxence admires Catherine's knowledge but deplores her confusion. He now summons the wisest philosophers of the empire and plans to have them confront Catherine in a doctrinal dispute. Should she fail to dominate them, she will be put to death. (ll. 1–208)

As the debate gets under way, Catherine gives the floor to the eldest among the fifty philosophers, but he insists on hearing her first. Catherine proceeds to describe the circumstances of her conversion and narrates the history of the Christian faith. Both parties argue at some length on the problem of Christ's dual nature. The scholars emphasize the unsoundness of her argument: a god does not die, they say, and a man cannot rise from the dead. Catherine reverses the argument, stating that Christ died on account of His human nature and was resurrected because of His divine one. At the conclusion of her speech, the scholars all acknowledge the superiority Catherine's argument and decide to adopt the Christian faith. Condemned to death by fire, they ask to be baptized in order to be protected from eternal death. Catherine tells them that they will receive the baptism of blood. They are fastened to the stake, but for a while God protects them from the flames; this miracle occurred on November 13, prompting the conversion of many onlookers. The philosophers now join God in Heaven. (ll. 209–1058)

Next, Maxence orders that Catherine be disrobed and whipped. She is then thrown into jail and left for twelve days without food. But angels come to attend her and produce a light so bright that the jailers flee in fear. They are careful to hide this event from the tyrant, whose rage they fear. Called away by a war, Maxence leaves town. Accompanied by Porphire, one of Maxence's favorite knights, the emperor's wife visits the saint. Frightened at first by the supernatural light and fragrance of the jail, both visitors are soon reassured by Catherine and convinced of Christ's superiority. Upon their return to the palace, Porphire narrates their adventure, and more than two hundred Romans convert. (ll. 1059–1707)

Back in Alexandria, Maxence summons his prisoner, who tells him about the celestial sustenance brought to her by God's angels. Maxence orders that she be dismembered. Catherine's assigned tormentors try, out of pity, to have her accept Maxence's offer. She refuses and reaffirms her unconditional love for God. Many convert, but keep their new faith hidden for fear of the tyrant's reprisals. Meanwhile, Cursate, the city provost, concocts a refined instrument of torture, consisting of four wheels equipped with blades. At this sight, the onlookers are struck with terror, but not Catherine, who prays to God that He show His power by destroying the device. Four thousand spectators are killed by its fragments. The tyrant's wife

now addresses Maxence in accusing terms; he orders that her breasts and feet be severed. Porphire buries her that night, so that in the morning the guards are unable to find the corpse. Maxence is about to have them killed when Porphire reveals his action and his own conversion. Many Roman knights follow his example and they are all beheaded. (ll. 1708–2435)

Unsuccessful in his final attempt to persuade Catherine, the tyrant has her taken outside the city where she is to be beheaded. Many onlookers grieve but Catherine reproaches them their tears. They should weep over their own error; as for her, she feels joy at the idea of the eternal bliss awaiting her. She now prays to God that He give her the power of interceding for whoever will commemorate her passion. On November 15, she is beheaded; her blood is transformed into milk as a sign of her virginity; her corpse is carried by angels to Mount Sinai; and a healing oil flows freely from her tomb. Let us commemorate her martyrdom, and may God forgive us our sins and grant us eternal life. (ll. 2436–2661)

Version D

“Par amor Dieu, vos pri, genz bone et bele”

Catherine D numbers 166 decasyllabic lines grouped in 21 rhyming stanzas of unequal length. The poem is preserved in a single manuscript.²⁹

According to the editor (Fawtier-Jones), the author was a minstrel who did not follow any specific source but chose among the most suggestive episodes of a well-known legend. A linguistic analysis of the text leads the editor to believe that the minstrel was from Poitou or Aunis; he might have composed his poem for a fair held near the monastery of Sainte-Catherine-de-La-Rochelle.³⁰

Summary

Listen, good people, to the passion of a holy virgin, a king's daughter whose name was Catherine. She was born in Alexandria and studied the seven arts. No one was more learned or more beautiful than she. After her father's death, she chose to lead a life of poverty so as to become worthy of entering Paradise. (ll. 1–18)

Caesar, the emperor at that time, was a very cruel tyrant. Seeing how fear incites many Christians to obey his command and to sacrifice to the pagan gods, Catherine decides to challenge Caesar. The emperor marvels at her knowledge and

summons fifty scholars to debate with her. Soon convinced by her arguments, they convert and are condemned to death by fire. Their robes are miraculously spared during the ordeal, a “bewitchment” which prompts Caesar to seek revenge. (ll. 19–76)

Catherine is brought to the emperor who offers to marry her and promises her great riches and honor. Catherine answers by revealing that Christ is her Spouse, infinitely more magnificent than Caesar. She is at once disrobed and flagellated. When she sees the sharp instrument that has been built for her torture, she is greatly afraid. She asks God to spare her from this ordeal. A bolt of lightning destroys the device, along with Caesar’s pagan ministers. More than a thousand onlookers convert. (ll. 77–110)

Outraged, Caesar has the heroine thrown into a dark jail, where she is to endure imposed fasting. But Christ protects her by sending her divine nourishment. After a visit to Catherine, the emperor’s wife and Porphire convert. Caesar condemns them to death, along with two hundred other converts. Yet he feels both sadness and fear at the idea of tormenting the maiden. One of his knights insists that Catherine must be destroyed before causing any more harm through her diabolic power. She is thus taken outside the city. God grants her request that she may intercede for whoever invokes her name. She is beheaded; her blood becomes milk, a sign of virginity; angels carry her corpse to Mount Sinai; and a healing oil flows from her tomb. I could not tell you all of the miracles performed thanks to her. But let us pray to God that, through her intercession, He may grant us peace and health, and welcome us after death. (ll. 111–64)

Version E

“Nous trovomes en nos escris”

There is as yet no complete edition of *Catherine E*. This text, which comprises 1,430 octosyllabic lines in rhyming couplets, has been partly transcribed by Cahier, whose publication, which does not number the lines of the poem, is the basis of the following summary. Seven manuscripts³¹ contain this Life.³²

Cahier, who attributes this poem to Wace,³³ points to the resemblances between the episodes of *Catherine E* and the sixteen medallions of a stained-glass window in the cathedral of Auxerre. This version of the legend echoes that of Aumeric (*Catherine C*) and its probable source is the *Vulgata*.

Summary

Maxence has decided to organize a sumptuous ceremony in honor of the gods: the whole empire must go to Alexandria and participate in the sacrifice. An eighteen-year-old maiden called Catherine decides to confront the emperor. A king's daughter, she is as beautiful as she is learned. Entirely devoted to God, she comes before the emperor to accuse him of impiety. Dazzled by her beauty, Maxence summons his best scholars in order to convince her of her error. The heroine's attitude is one of courage. She asks God to assist her during the debate.

When she ends her speech, the scholars find no reply and at once convert. Maxence weeps before such treason and condemns them to be martyred. The scholars die praising God; miraculously, their garments are not touched by the flames, to the onlookers' wonder. Once again, Maxence attempts to reason with the maiden and promises her great honors; in vain. Enraged, he orders that Catherine be whipped, then thrown into a dark jail. For twelve days she is visited by Christ and His angels; her wounds are cured and she receives celestial sustenance. Certain that the jailers have violated his orders, Maxence has them tortured.

One of the emperor's barons convinces Maxence that he should not let himself be humiliated by a woman; he also describes a device of torture he has in mind. A large crowd gathers on the day of the punishment. Catherine prays to God that He may manifest His power: a flash of lightning suddenly destroys the device, causing the death of four hundred spectators.

In her palace, Maxence's wife, who has visited Catherine in prison and has converted to the true faith, hears of the miracle. At once, she goes before her husband and accuses him of being Satan's disciple. Maxence curses the Christians for having bewitched his wife, who is then tortured and beheaded.

Once again, Maxence attempts to convince the heroine. Catherine's resistance provokes his rage. She is taken outside the city. Before she is beheaded, the saint exhorts the crowd to repudiate the pagan gods; she then prays to God that He may grant her the power of intercession. After her death, angels carry her corpse for twenty days and bring it to Mount Sinai. From her tomb, a holy oil flows freely, curing those who are blind, the lepers, and all illnesses.

The Life of Saint Christina

“Li sages Salemons ki fluns fu de savoir”

This poem of 3,800 alexandrine lines in rhyming couplets is contained in two manuscripts.³⁴

The hagiographer is the relatively well-known Benedictine monk Gautier de Coinci, the author of the *Miracles Nostre Dame*, whose first book was completed around the year 1218 while Gautier was in the monastery of Vic-sur-Aisne near Soissons.³⁵ In his first book of Miracles,³⁶ Gautier refers to the *Life of Saint Christina* which, he says, he composed *Pautr'an*. Ott, the editor of *Christina*, who interprets this allusion as meaning “some years ago,”³⁷ sets the date of composition of the Life between the year 1214, when Gautier arrived at Vic, and 1218.

Gautier was not only a learned man well versed in theology and music, but also an interesting poet whose imagination and devotion allowed him to adapt his source intelligently.³⁸ Gautier refers to his source on several occasions, for example when he mentions that he found his story in “a book” preserved in the monastery of Saint-Medard at Soissons (l. 27). As Ott points out (pp. xvii–xxxii), the Saint-Medard library was scattered long ago and the book mentioned by Gautier might well have been a composite text of several Latin documents.

Meyer³⁹ posits the existence of a second French *Life of Christina*, in reference to a short quotation contained in a seventeenth-century anthology.⁴⁰ Besides Gautier’s rendition, the Christina legend inspired three other French poems: one composed by Nicholas Bozon at the beginning of the fourteenth century,⁴¹ and two dating from the fifteenth century.

The cult of Christina (often confused with Christina of Tyre) started at the city of Bolsena, in whose lake she is said to have been thrown. From Italy, her popularity spread to France and to Germany. The numerous tortures inflicted on her by her father, which are borrowed from other legends like those of Barbara, Catherine, and Ursula, have particularly inspired the artists. Wheels, tongs, arrows, snakes, the stake, and flames are thus favorite iconographic motifs during the Middle Ages.⁴²

Gautier begins his poem by criticizing those listeners who prefer hearing stories about fictional characters of secular literature, such as Renart and Isengrin, rather than accounts relating the lives of the saints. He also apologizes (ll. 1–52) for not using here the rhyme that is the distinctive feature of his *Miracles Nostre Dame*.⁴³

(At the time when Christ's Church was starting to flourish, there was in Tyre, Lombardy, a noble Saracen, named Urbain, very proud and vainglorious. He honored Apollo and Diana, and hated the Christians so much that he had caused the death of many saintly men and women.)

- 75 Urbain had neither a son nor a daughter
 And was bitterly complaining to his gods.
 His error was such, his mind was so blind and foolish
 78 That he kept sacrificing to his false gods.
 His wife also made many offerings to them,
 Expressing a similar distress.
 Urbain was most anxious to have a child.
 82 He felt anger and sorrow for not having an heir
 To whom he could bequeath his name,
 His wealth, and all his possessions.
 God finally gave him—so that His name be praised—
 86 A very beautiful daughter, whose name was Christina.
 She loved and honored Jesus Christ so deeply
 That she came to suffer, in His name,
 Torments such as no one had ever endured before.
 90 He who will forever be,
 And who can render everything eternal
 —That is, He who suffered the death of the cross—
 Blessed her so much that, at eleven years of age,
 She was granted the eternal bliss of Paradise.
 [. . .]
 133 Seeing how Nature had endowed her
 With unsurpassable beauty,
 Urbain felt a deep love for his daughter,
 136 And could not spend a day without kissing her eyes and her face.
 She was so graceful that no one could see her
 Without wishing her honor, long life, and joy.
 Many people who had neither seen nor met her
 140 Honored her for her well-known merits.
 But many felt anguish and dismay,
 Seeing that she showed no care for the world.
 The King of the whole universe
 144 Had indeed inspired in her
 The desire to love only spiritual things

And to despise this world and all human pleasures.
Thus, Christina thought that temporal concerns

148 Were nothing in the face of death.

Great was her father's dismay, when he became aware of her disposition.

He felt abandoned and threatened,
Realizing that she might persist in her attitude.

152 Her words and her behavior made him understand

That, were she ever to hear of Jesus Christ,
She would devote herself to Him.

He was so afraid of this and so anguished,

156 That he kept thinking about the matter:

"If I do nothing, it might well happen

That she meet some Christians

Who will teach her the Christian law

160 And convince her to give up my gods.

I love her as much as a father can love his daughter.

But I would rather see her drown in the sea

Than let her believe in Him whom the Jews hung.

164 The Christians say that stones split in two

At the hour of His death.

Foolish is he who trusts such words.

They also say that He came back from the dead on the third day.

168 This is what awes them the most.

I do not wish for Christina to hear of this,

For if she were to err, I would die of grief."

The pagan father, who had neither the true faith nor the true belief,

172 Began to think about his daughter night and day.

His fears were so great

That he decided to have a tower built,

A tower more beautiful than any ever seen.

(The tower is richly adorned with idols made of gold and gems. Urbain now invites his daughter to live there in the company of twelve ladies-in-waiting, and to honor the idols. Christina obeys, hiding her contempt for the pagan gods.)

245 Her fame becomes such that it is said everywhere

That there exists in Tyre a beautiful maiden

So wise, comely, and courteous

248 That no woman can compare to her.

From throughout the country many noblemen arrive,

Who express their desire to marry this maiden.

“Lords,” says Urbain, “I can neither grant your request

252 Nor speak in her name,

For I believe her heart to be so pure

- That she might want to devote herself to virginity.
 I hardly dare speak to her about your request.
 256 I will nevertheless attempt to talk with her,
 In case one of you might make her change her mind.
 I will then lay out many rich clothes,
 And arrange the most beautiful wedding ever held
 260 In Tyre, if the maiden so wishes,
 She whom I love more than anyone alive."

(Urbain presents the suitors' request to his daughter, who replies with the following:)

- 315 "Sweet father," she says, "listen to me!
 I will tell you some of my reactions.
 Know that I am greatly surprised
 318 And more than dismayed by your intent.
 You are heartless indeed, and harsh,
 When you want to give away so young a child.
 You have no other son or daughter, only me,
 322 Who am not yet eleven years old, as you know,
 And much too young and small to be thus committed.
 And yet you want to chase me away from you!
 He does not like his child much, he who wants thus to
 326 Get rid of her."

(Filled with love and compassion for his daughter, Urbain consents to her request, which he mistakes for a sign that she is devoted to his gods: he will let her live in her tower and devote herself to prayer and chastity.)

- 377 Urbain returns to his visitors
 And lets them know of his daughter's reaction:
 "Lords," he says, "neither king, prince, nor baron
 380 Will she accept as her husband.
 I will no longer hear any marriage request,
 And will not let myself be convinced otherwise,
 Even if I was offered all of Priam's gold.
 384 I love her so much that I dare not contradict her.
 Since she has decided to devote herself to our gods,
 There is one thing I can promise:
 As long as I live, in the name of my gods, never will she become
 388 A married lady, unless she so desires."
 Hearing this, the visitors lament
 And leave with much sadness.

(Inside her tower, Christina does not honor the gods but stays by an eastward window, glorifying God. Her behavior greatly disturbs her female companions.)

- 520 The twelve maidens tear their silk garments,
 Pull their hair, strike their faces,
 And fall at her feet: "Lady," they say,
 "It would have been better for us not to be born
 524 Than to see you entrapped by the Christian law.
 We will die a horrible death,
 Should this news reach your father's ears,
 And should he discover that you adore
 528 Him whose feet were pierced and who died on the cross.
 If He were truly a god, he would have escaped from his fate.
 Your faith in Him is madness,
 If you think He can help you,
 532 He who was unable to help Himself.
 You should not trust Him,
 But you should sacrifice to your father's gods,
 Who assist and save all those who serve them,
 536 Granting them comfort and wealth."
 At these words, Christina turns purple with anger:
 "Alas! Wretched women, how stained are your hearts
 When you adore gods and goddesses of metal!
 540 Jesus Christ can destroy all those who honor these idols.
 And those who sacrifice to them are foolish,
 For these idols have neither eyes nor ears.
 They cannot move their arms, hands, or feet,
 544 And remain, motionless, always in the same place.
 They are deaf and dumb, having neither sense nor reason.
 I care only to pray to God, the King of the world.
 Cursed be whoever adores these false gods!
 548 My heart is so filled with hatred toward them that,
 If I live long enough, they will not escape from me.
 I will throw them down from this tower, one hundred and one
 leagues,
 Thus destroying each of them.
 552 Such will be my way of 'adoring' and 'honoring' them."
 Around her, the twelve maidens swoon.
 "Lady," they say, "how dare you criticize
 The gods who have granted you such beauty?
 556 You are so comely and so fair that everyone likes
 You and your beauty, above all women alive.
 Kings and noblemen are seeking to have you,
 For everyone of them desires to possess you
 560 Because of your beauty and wisdom.
 Every day, they send their pledges and requests.
 Alas! Our life will soon come to an end!
 Where could we find the tears that we must shed?
 564 We will be devoured by lions and by wolves,

- Or hung, or burned in a fire,
 As soon as your father hears, fair lady,
 That your heart has abandoned our law
 568 For Him who was whipped and beaten.
 If you do not at once sacrifice to our gods,
 At the temple where one must worship them night and day,
 We will tell him everything tomorrow.
 572 It is our duty to keep silent no longer.”
 Christina answers them: “If He loves me,
 He who created the sea, the earth, and the sky,
 I have no care whether you tell my father.
 576 For the Holy Spirit, in His great kindness, has filled
 My heart with strength and faith,
 To such a degree that I no longer belong to my father, my mother,
 or any friend.
 I have entrusted myself to Him
 580 Who takes care of His friends,
 And helps them in such a way that he never leaves them,
 Overwhelming them with His strength and delighting them with
 His kindness.
 Go, tell my father that I am a Christian,
 584 And that I have abandoned Apollo and Diana.
 You can indeed tell him that I despise
 All his gods and goddesses, and his beliefs.”

(Coming that day to the tower, Urbain discovers that Christina is a Christian. Tenderly, he tries to convince her to recant and to sacrifice to the gods before they take their revenge.)

- 693 Christina cannot contain herself any longer.
 God wishes for such a treasure to be revealed at once.
 “Say no more,” she tells Urbain, “and do not ever
 696 Call me your daughter!
 I am not your daughter, for I only want to be
 The daughter of the highest king, the glorious King of Heaven.
 I have no other God, and no one should choose another.
 700 He has created the sky, the earth, and the sea,
 In such a wise and wonderful manner
 That the four elements serve us day and night.
 To Him I am betrothed, Him I trust,
 704 To Him I sacrifice day and night.
 He is the God that can do everything and never lies,
 He is the God who has no end and no beginning,
 He is the God whom everyone must trust and serve,
 708 He is the God who, should He so desire, can destroy the
 Universe.”

At these words, Urbain feels great joy,
Thinking that she is referring to Tervagant⁴⁴ or Mahomet.
He wants to kiss and to embrace her.

- 712 But she turns her face and her body away.
And loudly she says: "Do not touch me,
Go away, go away, do not seek my mouth!
I want to make to God a pure and stainless offering."

(Christina now proceeds to praise the Trinity, to Urbain's dismay, for he is unable to understand such a concept. He leaves the tower, trusting that she will agree to sacrifice to the gods on the following day. During the night, an angel brings Christina divine sustenance; she then proceeds to throw all the idols down from the window. Tying sheets and clothes together, she escapes from the tower and distributes her riches to the poor of the city. Meanwhile, Urbain lays awake, unable to find sleep.)

- 994 "By my gods," he says to himself, "I could die,
Seeing how the daughter I have loved so tenderly
Cares for my gods no more than for a rotten apple.
If she refuses to adore them tomorrow,
998 I will shame her in a way she will always remember.
He who spoils and pampers his child loses him;
For one must punish and beat one's child when he behaves badly.
Solomon himself says that 'He who omits to chastise his child,
1002 Only feeds in him pride and vainglory'."
Tossing and turning, he ponders this matter.

(The following day, Urbain is angered to see that Christina has destroyed the idols. He violently slaps his daughter's face, then has her beaten publicly. But God protects her and she feels no pain.)

- 1117 Seeing this miracle, Urbain assumes that it is the result of
witchcraft.
"All your sorcery," he tells his daughter,
"Will not keep you from being dismembered and destroyed."
1120 "You cannot affect me," she answers, "by beating me or hurting me,
For all the torments and tortures you order
Bring me nothing but joy and pleasure.
He renders me service, who beats me for Him
1124 Who puts pride and vainglory down.
He has indeed annihilated the haughtiness of those
Who have just tried to cut and beat my flesh.
And your pride also will be put to shame.
1128 If your gods are so powerful, let them come and help you now."

(Unable to subdue her, Urbain orders that she be thrown into a dark cell. Her hands and feet are tied; a pillory is set around her neck. Learning this, her anguished mother pays her a visit.)

- 1200 "Christina, alas! my beautiful daughter!
 No maiden endowed with so many talents,
 And born from such an honorable lineage,
 Ever found herself tied to a shameful pillory.
- 1204 Seeing you in this state, my beautiful daughter,
 I want to kill myself before tonight, unless you take pity on me.
 Your father too will die, ill as he now is,
 Unable to eat or drink, so deep is his sorrow.
- 1208 You used to be so wise:
 Why do you now despise the law and the teaching
 Of the faith in which wise men believed since the beginning?
 My fair daughter, who put in your heart
- 1212 This command to leave father, mother and friends,
 Joy and honor, riches and power,
 For Him whom the Jews hung and put to death?"
 "Mother," says Christina, "know that
- 1216 Your gods and goddesses have neither strength nor power.
 For they should have taken their revenge for what I did to them,
 If they existed and had the power to do so.
 Indeed, they should all die in shame,
- 1220 Those who adore them, for these gods do not deserve
 Any honor, sacrifice, or any such attention.
 Fair mother, I will not let my father force me
 To adore their images, since I hate and despise them,
- 1224 And indeed detest them more than anything on earth.
 I am a Christian; I do not care to hide that fact,
 For He who has revealed His holy name
 Through His apostles, all over the world,
- 1228 Has given me faith and trust.
 Nothing will ever make me change my heart,
 For my love for Him who was born from the Virgin Mary is so
great,
- That I will never leave Him,
- 1232 Preferring instead to be burned or thrown into a well."
 The mother cries and moans, tearing her breast
 And the top of her silken dress.
 Her bosom is exposed, her flesh is naked.
- 1236 She faints at her daughter's feet. And when she comes to,
 "Daughter, daughter," she says, wringing her hands,
 "Know that, before long,
 This wretched woman will die of sorrow.
- 1240 But if you want me to live, Christina, fair daughter,
 Take pity on me. Pity your father,
 And pity me, your devoted mother,
 Who loves you so dearly and will always love you,
- 1244 Having fed you with my milk and carried you in me.
 Daughter, look at the womb where you lay for nine months!

- Look at the breast which your mouth sucked for milk!
 Daughter, have pity, in the name of the pain
 1248 And of the great discomfort which I endured on the day
 When you came out of my womb and were born into this world.”
 At these words, she faints again, five or six times.
 The holy maiden feels compassion in her heart,
 1252 When she hears what her mother tells her.
 Here she lies, faint, and more yellow than wax.
 The holy maiden sighs deeply,
 And it is no surprise if her heart is moved.
 1256 Weeping and praying, she addresses the Holy Spirit,
 Who took all terrestrial love out of her heart.
 Her mother cries again: “Daughter, have you heard me?
 Showing a heart so harsh, you hurt me deeply.
 1260 Come talk to your father, get out of this jail.
 Everything he said will be forgotten,
 If you accept to adore and honor his gods.”
 The maiden cries out: “How cruel these words!
 1264 Go away, go away, you are not my mother.
 If I want to follow the Holy Scriptures,
 I must abandon everything and follow Jesus Christ.”
 [. . .]
 1273 The mother answers: “Alas! Such cruel words
 Were never said before by a daughter to her mother!
 Daughter, you have spoken to me so harshly
 1276 That it could indeed be said of me that I am an unnatural mother
 If I do not kill or drown myself.
 You should never have addressed your mother
 In such a heartless manner.
 1280 Cruel are the daughters who mistrust their mothers.”
 [. . .]
 1316 “Mother, in God’s name, leave me in peace! For too harsh
 Are your deceiving words, too filled with venom.
 Even if the Devil softened them
 And mixed them with the honey of terrestrial love,
 1320 He would not succeed in taking me away from Christian law.
 And Jesus Christ, the high King, would not let this happen,
 He whose very Name forms the letters of my own.
 My name follows His, and I will similarly follow Him,
 1324 Abandoning my father and my mother in His name,
 And forsaking my inheritance, which pleases only the weak
 Who lose their soul for the comfort of their body.
 No word you say will ever lead me astray.
 1328 If I am not mistaken, of all the members of your lineage
 —Lady or maiden, lass or young girl—
 None was ever known by the name of Christina.”

- “No, sweet daughter, I never heard of it.”
 1332 The maiden rejoices and adds:
 “I must indeed adore God, the high King in Heaven,
 Who deigned become my godfather.
 When one calls me Christina, one calls me a Christian.
 1336 Jesus Christ’s sweet name illuminates mine,
 He who deigned put the gold of His name in mine.
 This is why I will let my eyes be gouged out
 And my teeth be pulled from my mouth,
 1340 Rather than be separated from Him.”
 [. . .]
 1349 “Daughter,” says the mother, “you have a very harsh heart
 When you show no care even for your own body.
 Nothing I do or say will ever soften you.”
 1352 Realizing that she has failed, the mother leaves the prison,
 Wringing her hands, crying, weeping, and moaning.

(The mother tells Urbain of her failure to convince Christina. Enraged, Urbain summons her before him the following morning.)

- 1407 Seeing his own child, Urbain is first filled with pity.
 “Alas!” he says to himself, “how can I put on trial
 The one I used to love beyond measure?”
 1410 Within him, Cruelty and Nature are fighting.
 Cruelty inspires him to destroy her at once.
 “Alas,” says Nature, “you would destroy your own joy,
 If you put to death the one you engendered.”
 “Keep quiet,” says Cruelty, “she is no longer his,
 1415 She who has acted in such a wicked way.”
 [. . .]
 1444 Urbain looks at his daughter, admiring her beauty.
 Nature tells him to speak to her tenderly,
 But Cruelty attempts to keep Nature away,
 So harsh, so mad, and so violent is Cruelty.
 1448 Sweetly, he says: “Fair daughter, listen to me!
 There is nothing in this world, I swear,
 That I have loved as much as you.
 [. . .]
 1460 “Daughter, trust your father and your mother,
 Accept to serve our powerful gods!
 [. . .]
 1473 “A daughter must never contravene her father,
 But must always obey and follow his wishes.”
 She who has been taught by the Holy Spirit
 1476 Now arms herself with the sign of the cross.
 She answers: “Your wishes would put me in exile.

- But I do not belong to you, nor am I your daughter,
 But the daughter of a high King, my spiritual Father.
 1480 Whatever you engender is the work of Satan.
 And indeed you and your gods are devils.
 The Holy Spirit has inspired my heart
 In such a way that I fear neither you nor your power,
 1484 Gods and goddesses, faith and beliefs.”

(Angered by these words, Urbain orders that she be disrobed, hung by her hair, and beaten. He again asks her to adore the gods. Christina replies by throwing at him a piece of her own tortured flesh. She is now taken outside the city, and beaten all the way to the stake. Among the spectators, some feel that she deserves her punishment, but others pity her.)

- 1600 Ladies and maidens all cry out.
 Massed at every door and window, they climb over each other
 In an attempt to see better the maiden whom the evil soldiers
 Are beating so cruelly, front and back,
 1604 That her flesh is broken in more than a hundred places.
 Blood flows down from her breasts.
 The women spectators lacerate their faces,
 When they witness the torments endured by their lady.
 1608 “Alas!” they all say, “one has never seen
 Such a beautiful body endure so shameful a treatment.
 Alas! Evil Urbain, foolish man,
 What madness inspires you to do this?”
 1612 You are putting to death the most beautiful child ever born.
 Nature has failed you, since you are killing your own daughter.
 Only a cruel father would commit such an act.
 Never has any maiden endured such tortures
 1616 Since the days of Abraham.
 May the God in whom she believes
 Show now His power, if He has any, to her tormentors.”

(Christina is attached to a wheel equipped with sharp blades and set upon a fire. God performs a miracle: the flames leap onto the onlookers, burning eleven hundred people. This miracle causes many to convert. Afraid that his people might all recant, Urbain decides to have her thrown into the sea, a millstone around her neck. The stone becomes as light as a feather, and Christina is saved.)

- 2013 According to my source, which we can trust,
 It is said that at that very moment, Christina’s father died
 A most horrible and painful death.
 2016 To the dark prison of Hell,
 The devils took his soul.
 May God protect us from such an end.

When Christina hears of her father's death,
 2020 She weeps and lifts her hands upward.
 She thanks God for having protected her
 By shooting His arrow, thus avenging
 Those who serve Him and seek Him.

(When the emperor of Rome hears of Urbain's death, he sends Dion, one of his cruelest men, to Tyre. Christina is subjected to a new series of tortures, during which she causes the statue of Apollo to be reduced to powder.)

2781 When Dion sees the shameful fate inflicted
 Upon his god Apollo, whom he cared for greatly,
 And when he sees the number of conversions this event has
 provoked,
 He strikes his breast,
 Pulls his hair out, and lacerates his face:
 2786 "Alas!" he says, "I know neither what to do,
 Alas! nor where to go, alas! nor where to flee!
 The emperor will have me burned.
 He will concoct the most terrible torture
 2790 To put me to death,
 When he hears about Apollo.
 Alas! how could I be such a fool,
 That I did not cut off her head as soon as I arrived here?
 2794 My pride and honor have been put to shame.
 She should have already died a shameful death.
 Cursed be the ground on which she walks,
 She who by witchcraft has deceived this people."
 2798 Having said these words, Dion throws himself to the ground,
 Overwhelmed by so deep an anguish
 That his heart breaks.
 And a horrible death takes him.

(A second tyrant, Julian, is sent from Rome. He submits Christina to the torture by fire, has two venomous snakes thrown at her, and then orders that her breasts be cut off. But she escapes from the flames unharmed and tames the snakes, while milk, rather than blood, flows out of her chest. The following day, Julian severs her tongue, which Christina throws at him, piercing his eye. Julian then orders that her heart be brought to him, and she finally dies. Julian soon follows suit. Christina is buried in a rich tomb.)

3761 Through Jesus Christ, she performed so many miracles
 That I could not possibly tell them all.
 These miracles prompted the people of Tyre to convert
 3764 And to believe in God, the King of truth.
 May all those who will read this story

- Remember this maiden day and night.
 Everyone who hears or reads her Passion
 3768 Will recognize her great merits.
 Truly, whoever prays to her
 Will receive her help
 From the King of Paradise: God will forever grant
 3772 Every one of her requests.
 May God grant eternal glory
 To those who serve, honor, and pray to Him.
 On the ninth day after the Kalends of August,
 3776 The holy maiden went to the blissful place
 Where those who are still on earth will one day go.
 May God, every day, now and forever,
 Grant this happy sojourn
 3780 To all those who will honor this holy day
 In the name of the maiden whose earthly sojourn did not last long.
 It was on a Thursday that she left this world,
 Her white and tender flesh all tortured.
 3784 And it was on account of her torments that she was welcomed to
 Paradise.
 Here ends my story, and my source.
 I pray to the maiden whom I have so dearly loved,
 And whom I still love now and will love forever,
 3788 That she pray for me
 To Him who is the beginning and the end,
 So that He help us be good and perfect on earth,
 Have a peaceful end,
 3792 And deserve eternal joy. Amen.

The Life of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary

The case of Elizabeth of Hungary is a very unusual one in the context of thirteenth-century French hagiographic romance. Elizabeth is, indeed, the only real-life contemporary woman among the saints figuring in this volume.

Various documents, particularly those of her canonization process, provide relatively ample information on her life and accomplishments. The daughter of King Andrew II of Hungary, Elizabeth was born in 1207 and betrothed at the age of four to the Duke Louis of Thuringia (Ludwig IV), the son of the Landgrave Hermann, who was himself eleven years old. They were married in 1220 at the Wartburg castle, near Eisenach, and lived happily for six years until Louis' sudden death in 1227 while preparing for a crusade. Elizabeth's brother-in-law took this opportunity to deprive her of her inheritance, a disappropriation which prompts Karl to compare her story to other similar legends about persecuted women.⁴⁵ Her resulting state of poverty inspired Elizabeth to send her three children away and to live a life of charity as a member of the Third Order of St. Francis.⁴⁶ Under the spiritual guidance of Conrad of Marburg, a Dominican inquisitor whose direction was both ruthless and brutal and who was to die in 1233 in an ambush, Elizabeth spent the rest of her short life devoting herself to the care of the poor and the sick at Marburg. She died in 1231 and was canonized by her friend and protector, Pope Gregory IX, in 1235.

A number of Latin documents relate Elizabeth's accomplishments.⁴⁷ The vernacular poems composed in commemoration of Elizabeth, which are based on these Latin documents, tend to give a literal interpretation to her spiritual merits.⁴⁸ In addition to the three thirteenth-century French poems analyzed below, there is a fourth version composed by Nicholas Bozon in the fourteenth century.⁴⁹ The fame of Saint Elizabeth was to be long lasting. Recent evidence is an interview during which the late Marguerite Yourcenar expressed both her sustained interest in the saint and her desire to write about her.⁵⁰

Version A

“Cil Sires dist, que l'en aeure”

Selected on account of the relative fame of its author, Rutebeuf, this poem comprises 2,196 lines in rhyming couplets. Its most recent edition is that of Faral and Bastin,⁵¹ which also contains Rutebeuf's most probable Latin source. In the first volume of their work the editors give a full description of the two manuscripts in which Rutebeuf's version can be found.⁵²

Rutebeuf, a prolific author who composed fifty-five known works, identifies himself in fifteen of them, sometimes expanding, as he does in *Elizabeth A*, on the surname under which he became famous.⁵³ Probably from the region of Champagne, Rutebeuf spent the major part of his life in Paris, from around 1254 on. He was well educated, knew Latin, and was well versed in the secular literature of his time. A professional poet, Rutebeuf described his frequent bouts with poverty with both verve and sincerity.⁵⁴ His ironic view of society, which addressed hypocrisy in every social order, including the Mendicant Orders, was combined with a genuine piety,⁵⁵ as expressed in his *Life of Saint Elizabeth*, his *Life of Mary the Egyptian*, and other devotional compositions.

An interesting aspect of *Elizabeth A* is the comparison Rutebeuf establishes between Elizabeth of Hungary and Isabelle of Navarre, to whom the poem is dedicated (ll. 16–17). Born in 1242 and the daughter of King Louis IX, Isabelle was married to Thibaut of Champagne, King of Navarre, in 1258. Isabelle, who had been pious since her childhood, took the habit of the Minors after the death of her husband in 1270, on his return trip from the Crusades. She died soon after, in 1271. The poem was therefore composed between 1258 and 1270, since Rutebeuf refers to Isabelle as the “Queen of Navarre” (ll. 2171–72).

The apostle whom we honor says:
“He should not eat, who does not work.”

But he who can work

- 4 And in his working can adore
Jesus, the Spiritual Father
—Whom it is good to honor—
Can do a good deed both with his body and soul.
- 8 I therefore pray to the glorious Lady
—Mary, the Virgin Maiden,

- By Whom all women are healed
 If they pray to Her and love Her—
 12 To enable me to sow in a good place
 My word, and to recount my story
 (For I do not know any other trade),
 In a way most pleasing
 16 To the one for whom I undertake this task,
 Namely, Isabelle, the wife of King Thibaut.
 May God rejoice
 In His kingdom, with His friends,
 20 Where He settled His disciples.
 For her, I want to attempt
 To put this story in rhyme,
 A story which came from Hungary
 24 About the Trial [of canonization] and the Life
 Of a lady whom Jesus Christ
 Loved so dearly, according to my source,
 That he called her to His service.
 28 One reads about her in the holy Church.
 Elizabeth was the name of this lady,
 Who gave to God her body and her soul.

(Rutebeuf now relates how Pope Gregory IX initiated the process of Elizabeth's canonization in 1234. Documents and testimonies were gathered at Marburg, in Hesse, where Elizabeth died in 1231.)

- 255 At this point, the story relates
 That, at the age of five,
 Elizabeth—God's friend,
 258 And the daughter of the king of Hungary—
 Began to do good.
 Since that age, and further on,
 She had as a friend a maiden,
 262 Young, beautiful, and fair,
 A pure and sinless virgin,
 A lass more than a maiden.
 They grew up together,
 266 Since the time one was five and the other four years old.
 The testimony of this maiden was sought after,
 Gathered, and examined,
 Because she had lived with the lady
 270 Many winters and many summers,
 And could therefore closely describe
 The behavior of her companion.
 She swore to tell the truth, and then said:
 274 "Listen, pay attention to my words,

- And you will hear," she said, "of this lady
 Who did well for God and on this earth.
 I tell you in good faith
- 278 That this lady, since childhood,
 Devoted herself entirely
 To God and to religion.
 Such was her desire,
- 282 Her wishes, and her mode of life.
 Although she was not yet five years old,
 And did not know how to read,
 She was already going to church with a Psalter
- 286 As if to recite the holy service.
 She wanted to stay close to the altar
 As if she were able to read her prayers,
 Showing her piety
- 290 By lifting her robe, placing her naked knees on the ground,
 And kissing the pavement.
 She did not mean any harm.
 The children who lived with her
- 294 Would often play a special game
 Which consisted of hopping on one foot.
 She would take this pretext
 To flee toward the chapel,
- 298 Leaving behind the young girls,
 Acting as if she would not stay long in the chapel.
 And if she could not enter the chapel,
 She was so pure and devoted
- 302 That she would kiss the path leading to it.
 Know that, whenever she was close to the chapel,
 Playing at some game,
 Her thoughts and hopes
- 306 Were always directed to God, the King of glory.
 For even when she was playing,
 Her heart was really with God.
 Her body was at the game, not her soul:
- 310 The latter was with God, while the former remained at play.
 These children were playing many games.
 One of them, called the game of the ring,
 At which one can either win or lose,
- 314 Was played by her with much success.
 She was often the winner,
 And would then give away
 To the poor maidens
- 318 The tenth of all her gains.
 She who was thus enriched
 Was supposed to say, in exchange,

- The Pater Noster and the Hail
 322 Mary—our most worthy Lady.
 During this game, Elizabeth would often kneel,
 Clasp her hands secretly,
 And recite the Ave Maria
 326 From beginning to end.
 To anyone of her young girlfriends,
 She would say: 'I want you to sit beside me.
 I ask you this,
 330 Because I want to compare our height.
 For I wish to know
 Which of us two is the taller.'
 She in fact had no care to know her measure,
 334 But was using this pretext
 As a means—following her good habit—
 To recite more prayers.
 I can also tell you this:
 338 Saint John,
 The main guardian of chastity,
 Was on this account
 A favorite of hers.
 342 She was very devoted to this evangelist,
 Whom she served, loved,
 And held, after God, in the highest esteem.
 Anyone asking her something in the name of John
 346 Was always welcomed by her.
 She served and loved him,
 And, next after God, gave her body and soul
 To his protection.
 350 This was a very wise thing to do.
 If she committed any act
 Which shamed her,
 She knew that Saint John the Evangelist
 354 —Her master and priest—
 Would forgive her at once,
 So that the act would be forgotten.
 I can also tell you this:
 358 Before retiring at night,
 If she felt that she had not prayed
 To God and thanked Him enough,
 She would do so and thus spend her night
 362 Until morning.
 I will give you this summary:
 Games, laughter, songs,
 And all such activities of a normal child,
 366 Did not interest her.

She would avoid them, know it for certain,
For it did not seem to her the proper way
To go to the Friend that one must love,

370 A love which is without bitterness.

On feastdays and Sundays,
She would wear neither gloves nor sleeves
Until after noon.

374 And she had many other vows,
Too many for me to recount,
As I do not have enough time to tell them.
This is the way she spent her youth.”

$$\begin{bmatrix} \cdot & \cdot & \cdot \end{bmatrix}$$

473 When Elizabeth reached the proper age
To get married,
They gave her a husband. But she already had one.

476 And He who espoused her
Does not have to fear knights,
Seneschals, or intendants.
He is the King whom everyone serves,

480 Jesus Christ, who had her service.
The second part of her life
Starts when she left childhood,
At the time when a woman loses the name of maiden.

484 I want to tell you
How she became a lady.
You will now hear about this aspect of her story.
The good men [in charge of her canonization] were very anxious

488 To know the whole truth
About this lady's holy mode of life.
Many inquiries were made.
Ysentrutz, who was a widow,

492 A most devout and good woman,
Was with her five years, I believe,
Knowing her intimately
While Louis of Thuringia was still alive.

$$\left[\begin{array}{c} \vdots \\ \vdots \\ \vdots \end{array} \right]$$

500 Ysentrüz was asked by the investigators
To tell the truth,
And was ordered to swear.
She did so.

504 And undertook to relate openly
The truth, to the best of her abilities.
“Humble, filled with charity,
Such was Elizabeth,” she said.

508 "When she was in a chapel, her only desire
Was to stay there,

- And to keep praying.
 Her ladies-in-waiting would remark
 512 Among themselves about the fact that she did not want
 To come out of the chapel, or so it seemed.
 She would always find a way to escape from them
 And to run off in order to pray to God.
 516 You will never find anyone like her.
 However honored she was,
 And however loved and cherished,
 She would never forget God.
 520 There was a beggar
 Who did not have all his senses,
 For his head was indeed attacked
 By some illness
 524 Whose shameful cause should not be identified.
 But without naming it, one can understand
 Why no one dared to touch him.
 She would tend to him and care for him.
 528 She would wash him and cut his hair.
 And she did more for him than I could tell you
 Or recount to you.
 She would take him to her garden
 532 So as to see no one
 And to be seen by no one.
 And if some lady would criticize her,
 Her only reaction
 536 Was to laugh out of divine love.”
 A good man was also consulted,
 Whose name was Conrad.
 He was from Marburg, and assisted her
 540 When she made her vow of obedience
 To her Lord. That it may be known
 What kind of vow she made,
 Know that
 544 In the abbey of Eisenach
 —Consecrated to Saint Catherine—
 She made the vow
 To enter the abbey (as we find in our source)
 548 Should she survive her husband.
 Conrad also inspired her to avoid
 Eating food
 If she could know or guess
 552 That it had been obtained through plundering.
 And she followed this advice so well
 That no one ever suspected a thing.
 For when she was able to guess

556 The source of the food that was served,
 As she sat beside her husband,
 You would have sworn, through her gestures,
 That she was eating it, truly,
 560 More than anyone sitting at the table.
 She was in fact not eating anything,
 But was merely moving the food around on her plate.

[. . .]

685 Ysentruz also related the following: "When I wanted
 To wake her up, I would come
 To her bed and pull on her foot.
 688 And if, thinking I had
 Grabbed her foot, I would awaken
 Her husband, holding his foot instead of hers,
 He would draw it back
 692 And endure the mistake out of friendship.
 On a carpet by the bed
 She would often choose to sleep,
 In order to recite the many prayers
 696 That God loves to hear and holds dear.
 When she was found
 Sleeping this way beside her bed,
 She would explain wisely:
 700 'I want to chastise my flesh,
 Since it cannot endure
 Doing what is necessary for the soul.'
 Leaving her sleeping husband,
 704 She would go secretly to a room
 And have her servants beat her
 Until they were tired.
 This accomplished,
 708 She would happily go back to her bed.
 Every day during Lent,
 And, the rest of the year, once a week,
 She would ask to be beaten, I repeat,
 712 On Friday.

[. . .]

741 "To her lay women neighbors,
 Through fasting and mortifications,
 She would show how to flee the world.
 744 The course of the world is not straight,
 And should be avoided by everyone
 Who does not want to lose his soul.
 She would take them away from entertainment
 748 And from any such games which, in her opinion,
 Can threaten the soul.

- She took pleasure in advising them
 On how to lead a virtuous life,
 752 By being for them an example.
 When the townswomen of the domain,
 Clothed in their mantles,
 Would go to attend the service of Purification Day,
 756 Each one would dress as a countess
 And pay much attention to her attire.
 That is the way they liked to go to church.
 But as for her, she would do otherwise
 760 And go in poor clothing,
 With bare feet.
 In the muddy road,
 She would dismount
 764 Without asking for a chair or a horse.
 She would enter the church, holding her child
 And carrying a lighted candle.
 She would put her load down on the altar
 768 Along with a lamb, thus imitating
 Our Lady at the temple,
 Who was her model.
 In honor of God and of Our Lady,
 772 She would give to a poor woman
 The dress she had on,
 Once back from the church.
 She would spend her time in prayers
 776 During the whole period of Rogations,
 And, in the midst of common women
 (Do not believe that this is a lie),
 She would hide herself.
 780 That pleased her greatly,
 And whenever possible
 She would readily do so.
 She would spin
 784 —There is no reason why I should keep this silent—
 Every time there was a feast.
 And she would give the clothing to the brother Minors,
 And to all those whose door
 788 Was open to misfortune.
 Should I say more
 And add to my words?
 She took pleasure in doing good works,
 792 And would for instance bury the dead.
 Were she to hear a poor man wonder
 And say: 'I cannot pay,
 And do not know what to do,'

- 796 She would pay his debts.
And it did not please her,
When a rich person was buried,
That he would be clothed in a new garment.
- 800 She would put on him an old cloth,
And would give away the new one.
That is how she would arrange the matter.
I can also say, lords, that
- 804 No matter where, nearby or far away,
She would go and visit the ill,
And sit by their bed.
The house could not be too dirty
- 808 That she did not show her compassion.
She would overlook the filth
In order to help people.
She was for them both a doctor and a mother.
- 812 And she was not one of those harsh doctors
Who take the money and run,
While their patients are still ill.
On the contrary, she would tend the sick one
- 816 And put her heart to helping him.”
[. . .]
- 1033 Death, who claims everyone,
Wiseman or fool,
Called for the Landgrave [Elizabeth’s husband].
- 1036 The lady became a widow.
‘Lady’, no, but rather, ‘poor woman’,
Given the evil knights
Who were in the domain.
- 1040 They threw her out of the castle and the tower,
Dispossessing her of her inheritance.
They did not leave her anything
That could have provided her with sustenance
- 1044 And with food.
Her husband’s brother lived there,
A young man who, seeing
The wrong done to his sister-in-law
- 1048 Never tried to redress it.
But she now had what she had asked for
—Everything she could have desired,
According to her dearest wish—
- 1052 Namely: a life of hardship.
This is indeed what she held most dear,
And what she had requested from God.
This is why I, Rutebeuf, can say:
- 1056 ‘Whatever one sows, one reaps.’

Thus forced out of her castle,
 She went to the city
 And entered the court of an innkeeper.

[. . .]

- 1069 She spent the night in their inn,
 In a way never endured by a lady.
 But the conditions did not bother her:
- 1072 Around midnight, she got up
 And went to hear the Matins
 At the Cordeliers', although her women neighbors
 Would not go to church at such an hour.
- 1076 She gave thanks to God
 For this ordeal,
 And piously
 Asked the Brothers
- 1080 To thank God for the honors
 He had given her,
 And then taken away.
 God had freed her from a heavy load.
- 1084 For he who is ladened with wealth
 Has his soul burdened
 With a load that the soul wishes to get rid of,
 But that the flesh greatly enjoys.
- 1088 This burden turns a man into a miser.
 He who accepts this burden
 Leaves himself open
 To the deceits of the Devil.
- 1092 She did not want to be burdened
 With this kind of load, but rid herself of it
 And threw it away.
 Let him take it who wants it:
- 1096 He will not be able to fly very high.
 The following day, know for certain
 That no one in the inn
 Dared to let her in.
- 1100 She went to one of her shepherds,
 Along with her children and maidens.
 Their night there was a great ordeal,
 On account of the cold inside
- 1104 That made their teeth chatter.
 The cold was intense
 And the house small.
 The young shepherd and his wife
- 1108 Went out to leave room for their lady.
 She said: "If I could see
 Our host, I would thank him

- For having welcomed us in his place,
 1112 Which is already so small.”
 The following day, she went back
 To the inn where she had spent the first night.
 None of her husband’s men
 1116 Was willing to give oath to her.
 Each one did as much wrong to her as he could,
 Even though she had never harmed any one of them.
 To some of her paternal relatives
 1120 —To some cousin or some brother—
 She sent her children away.
 But she remained there.
 Once, going to church
 1124 So as to listen to God’s service,
 She took a narrow road.
 Coming toward her,
 An old woman was approaching,
 1128 To whom she would often give alms.
 The street was very muddy,
 Making it difficult to walk,
 Except for a path of stones.
 1132 The old woman, not too wisely,
 Threw the lady down
 Into this muddy filth.
 She got up at once,
 1136 Took off her clothes, washed herself,
 And laughed about the adventure.
 [. . .]
- 1179 Around that time,
 It happened to this good lady
 That an aunt of hers, an abbess
 1182 Settled in the same country, wished
 That one of her brothers—of whom Elizabeth was a niece—
 Welcome Elizabeth for a while,
 With the honors due her station,
 1186 Until she could be married again.
 He was a bishop
 In a region of Hungary.
 The women who were with Elizabeth
 1190 And who had received her vows of chastity
 Greatly feared her going there
 And being forced to marry.
 But she reassured them,
 1194 Saying: “I would rather be dead
 Than act against my vow
 To God, to Whom I promised

- To be His spouse.
 1198 Their plans are nothing but dew,
 So do not fear:
 They can argue all they want.
 And know that, if my uncle forces me
 1202 To take a husband against my will,
 I will flee somewhere,
 Or I will do something,
 Like cutting off my nose.
 1206 If there is talk of marriage,
 No man will ever want
 Such a disfigured creature.”

(With the help and protection of the bishop of Thuringia, Elizabeth finally recovers her land, but chooses to distribute her wealth to the poor.)

- 1295 In the name of the spiritual Father,
 She founded a hospice.
 There, she welcomed
 1298 Many of Our Lord's poor.
 She would give them food and drink,
 Giving away all her possessions.
 By all of her friends, she was blamed,
 1302 Criticized, abandoned,
 And considered a fool,
 Because she tended the poor.
 When she would hear such insults,
 1306 She would greatly rejoice.
 During her pains and tribulations,
 While she was thus mistreated,
 The story says
 1310 That, after God, it was Pope Gregory who comforted her
 By sending her letters,
 And many writings
 Containing lessons
 1314 On how to live chastely,
 As well as examples of holy men and women,
 And other holy words.
 And he would promise her
 1318 That she would one day receive a sweet gift:
 The bliss of Paradise,
 Which in the old days was the reward of the saints.
 If she had wanted to acquire
 1322 Honor and goods,
 She could have done so even more easily than before.
 But she did not care for this any more than she would a breeze.

- Master Conrad would also advise her
 1326 Against the goods of the world.
 Between morning and evening,
 Such things disappear.
 As they come, they go,
 1330 No one knows where.
 But her love of God was so deep
 That she renounced all these things.
 She kept in mind her master's words,
 1334 So well that she succeeded
 In forgetting her children and wealth,
 Honors and marital bonds.
 She would tell her ladies-in-waiting:
 1338 "God has heard my prayers.
 As to my former position,
 I care for it no more than a piece of hemlock.
 And I do not love my own children
 1342 Any more than I do my neighbors' children.
 I give them and entrust them to God:
 May He do with them as He pleases!
 This life of hardship
 1346 And poverty
 Pleases me so much, know it for certain,
 That my joy is not small.
 I love only God,
 1350 My Creator and my Savior."
 [. . .]
 1789 She would not allow her servants
 To address her
 As 'lady,'
 1792 But 'Elizabeth,' or 'sister.'
 She would have them sit
 At the table by her side,
 Keeping them from sitting elsewhere,
 1796 For she wanted to see them beside her.
 She had them eat from her own plate.
 A 'lady' before, she was now a maiden indeed.
 Her servant, the wise Ermenjar, would say:
 1800 "You are looking for our downfall
 And making us vain,
 Forcing us thus to sit beside you
 And to acquire, in so doing,
 1804 Your power and nobility."
 But she would answer:
 "You are not sitting on my lap,
 But you must sit beside me
 1808 So that I can see you."

- She would wash plates and dishes
 Whenever they were dirty,
 Like an innkeeper's humble servant,
 1812 Abusing her own force and strength.
 She would give her clothes to the poor,
 So often that she kept only very few.
 Cooking, or heating the pot
 1816 So as to alleviate the great cold,
 She would sit in the kitchen,
 Having no other desire
 Than to look toward Heaven.
 1820 She feared neither cold nor frost,
 Caring not if she shivered.
 In this, she resembled Saint Martin
 Who kept looking toward Heaven,
 1824 And toward God, Who waits for his own.
 Sometimes, her robe would catch fire
 While she was thus looking upward.
 And the servants would rush
 1828 To save her dress from the fire.
 When her dress was torn,
 She would not seek another.
 Whether old or new,
 1832 She would keep wearing it.
 She would go and look after the poor,
 Taking care of their affairs,
 Bringing them bread and flour,
 1836 So good was this most noble lady.
 She would then resume her prayers.
 You could think she was in prison.
 Kneeling before the relics of holy men and women,
 1840 On her bare knees, hands clasped,
 She would adore them readily.
 She was indeed following God's way.
 [. . .]
 2023 Then came the hour of her end,
 An end so sweet
 That it was as if she fell asleep
 2026 And that her death was not her end.
 Four days passed before her body
 Was moved away and buried.
 A sweet odor emanated from it,
 2030 Overwhelming with its fragrance
 All those who were coming near
 And who would leave only reluctantly.
 There was no quarrel over how to cover the body.
 2034 It was covered with a grey cloth,

- And a sheet was put on her face to hide it.
 That was the extent of the 'gold' and 'silk' used.
 In great haste, a crowd
 2038 Came to cut out a piece of her.
 Parts of her hair and breast
 Were cut.
 Her toes, her fingernails
 2042 Were similarly cut, and perhaps more parts also.
 And the people would have dismembered her totally,
 If they had not been prevented from doing so.
 Poor people, healthy or sick,
 2046 Came in large number,
 Each one lamenting and moaning
 As if she were a mother or aunt.
 And I would bore you
 2050 If I attempted to tell you this in detail.
 For it is well known
 —By people of high and low condition,
 And by witnesses—
 2054 That God had often revealed to her
 His secrets, and that angels
 Were not unknown to her.
 She saw God himself face to face,
 2058 And a multitude of angels, many times.
 And when she had such visions,
 It seemed as if she were sleeping.
 Her face was all alight.
 2062 She certainly was taken to a beautiful place.
 But she kept all this silent, and did not reveal it
 —Except to wise and pious members
 Of the religious clergy,
 2066 Those who were devoid of madness or envy—
 Because of her great fear
 Of falling into vainglory.
 For she had never been vain,
 2070 But was used
 To being humble—since childhood—
 And to doing penance.
 I have told you a great deal
 2074 —Something that can easily turn into boredom—
 Yet I have not recounted to you the half
 Of the love and friendship
 That she would show to God night and day,
 2078 For I am afraid of tiring you.
 And despite the fact that it might
 Bore you,
 I will tell you that, where her body lay,

- 2082 Sixteen individuals were resurrected.
 To everyone's wonder,
 A blind man who devoutly came there
 —And who had never had any eyesight,
 2086 Nor any eye—
 Was granted sight.
 God is able to work such wonders.
 After she was put in a shrine
 2090 Made of lead, I tell you truly that a great amount
 Of oil oozed out,
 Running and dripping down.
 This is the truth indeed,
 2094 As attested by many witnesses.
 This oil oozed like so many drops of dew
 Joined together.
 The same thing happens with Saint Nicholas' body,
 2098 For both Nicholas and Elizabeth were never tired
 Of doing charitable deeds,
 As everyone well knows.
 This holy and saintly lady,
 2102 Who was never slow in serving God,
 Openly, day after day,
 Died the day after
 The Octave of Saint Martin,
 2106 In winter, if I remember rightly.
 She was buried
 In the chapel of her hospice,
 Which she had dedicated to Saint Nicholas,
 2110 To whom she remained faithful all her life.
 Following the will of Jesus Christ,
 —As our source says—
 Many abbots and other people
 2114 Came to carry her to the ground,
 And performed a most beautiful service,
 Such as the Church is wont to do.
 A rich man came to her shrine,
 2118 Who was extremely proud
 And filled with this mortal sin,
 So much so that, if death had taken him,
 He would have gone directly to Hell,
 2122 On a grey or on a black horse.
 He called on the lady,
 To whom he was very devoted,
 And thus found himself delivered from the Devil
 2126 Who had inspired in him this evil.
 This rich man realized what had happened,
 And was henceforth never tempted

- To commit any of the sins
 2130 With which the Devil had stained him.
 This lady was so compassionate
 That she made the hunchbacks stand straight,
 The deaf hear, and the possessed regain reason.
 2134 Every one of those who implored her
 Recovered his health.
 I cannot tell you all about her today.
 She performed many beautiful miracles
 2138 —My holy lady Elizabeth.
 Children should love her,
 For there was nothing harsh in her.
 She was neither severe nor mean with them,
 2142 But was for them a loving mother.
 And young people in their youth
 Must also love her and trust her,
 For she saved many
 2146 From spiritual death. And she also
 Saved many from physical death,
 Resurrecting them from the dead.
 Poor and rich people should love her,
 2150 She who was not mean toward the poor,
 But who generously gave
 With her own two hands.
 This is how this blessed lady lived
 2154 And gained the salvation of her soul.
 This poem about her was composed by Rutebeuf [“Rude-Ox”].
 Rutebeuf has accomplished his task,
 As well as he could.
 2158 Remember his name.
 ‘Rutebeuf,’ who works rudely
 And rudely performs rude tasks,
 And at times fails,
 2162 Has rudely completed his rough draft.
 It is not difficult to admit
 That an ox rudely harrows,
 Digging and striving and laboring.
 2166 So Rutebeuf harrows his rough rhyme,
 Never deviating, for Rutebeuf
 Is as rough and tough as an ox.
 I am comforted by the fact
 2170 That my work will be brought to a lady
 —Queen Isabelle
 Of Navarre—who will enjoy
 Having it read to her and listening to it.
 2174 She will take great pleasure in this.
 Lord Erart of Lézinnes asked me

- To write it, and to translate it
 From Latin into French,
 2178 Since it is a beautiful and fine story.
 So ends the story of the lady
 Who loved God with a faithful and pure heart,
 Most devoutly, most loyally.
 2182 And if its ending does not lie,
 She had a most refined end,
 Since she spent her time purifying herself
 And serving, with a fair heart,
 2186 The Lord Who lives without end.
 So let us pray to her
 Who purified herself through many fine deeds,
 That she pray for us to Him
 2190 Who refuses no one,
 And that she pray to Her
 Who was His Mother and Servant,
 That He allow us to know this bliss
 2194 That He granted her to enjoy.
 Explicit. Thanks be to God!
 Say Amen, all of you listeners.

Version B

“Sire deïx, plains de douçour”

This 933-line poem, a rendition of the story of Elizabeth written in octosyllabic rhyming couplets, is preserved in a single manuscript.⁵⁶ The anonymous author found his source in the *Vita* by Thierry of Apolda,⁵⁷ a Dominican at Erfurt who composed it between 1289 and 1297.⁵⁸ According to the editor,⁵⁹ the author of *Elizabeth B*, a monk, wrote his poem at the end of the thirteenth century. One of the posthumous miracles he attributes to Elizabeth, which has no identifiable source, serves to prove the imaginative rather than faithful manner in which the author adapted his Latin source.

Summary

I want to tell you about a saint who is now in Paradise because of the holiness of her life. The daughter of the King of Hungary, she was married to the landgrave of Thuringia. Their love was deep and mutual. She used to visit the poor and the sick.

Two witnesses—the abbot of Rebac [sic] and Brother Conrad—testified to the great miracles she performed and to her sanctity. Conrad wrote her life and told how she regretted not being a virgin. (ll. 1–66)

One time, a great famine spread throughout the land. Elizabeth transformed one of her castles into a hospital, gave her riches to the poor, tended the sick, all of this with her husband's approval. (ll. 67–136)

Another time, the landgrave met a knight passing by and invited him in. Having heard of Elizabeth's goodness, the latter expresses the desire to meet her. But she refuses to come and join them, having no proper garment to wear. God's angel provides her with a beautiful robe, a golden belt, and a crown. She later tells her husband of the divine origin of her costume, and he decides to devote himself to the service of God. He takes the cross to join a crusade and dies in the process, going straight to Paradise. (ll. 137–416)

Having heard of Elizabeth's fine repute, the Pope asks Conrad to become her spiritual director. She tells Conrad of her desire to enter the convent, but he forces her to keep her dowry. She creates a hospital for the poor and the sick, whom she tends lovingly. But Conrad disapproves of this activity, and sends the poor away, leaving only three women who serve Elizabeth. However, she secretly continues to care for a poor child and a young leper. When Conrad takes the latter away from her, she welcomes a young orphan suffering from ringworm. (ll. 417–612)

Her face was often seen as brightly lit. She also had visions. To a bishop asking her about her mode of life, she narrates how she forsook her wealth and tells of her readiness even to renounce her own two children. To Conrad, she predicts that she will die before him. And indeed she soon falls ill, confesses to Conrad, comforts those who grieve around her, sings a last beautiful prayer, and dies. (ll. 613–796)

On the third day, she is buried; from her body, which remains uncorrupted, an odor of sanctity emanates. Two days after Elizabeth's burial, a Cistercian monk is cured of a forty-year-long illness; a knight's wife, who died during her pregnancy, is resurrected along with her baby; and so are a young girl who had drowned, and a boy who had fallen into a well. (ll. 797–933)

Version C

“Hom, qui samblance en forme a”

The third thirteenth-century poem commemorating Saint Elizabeth numbers 2,280 octosyllabic lines in rhyming couplets. Edited by Jubinal,⁶⁰ *Elizabeth C* is preserved in a single manuscript.⁶¹

The author, a monk, names himself in the last line: Robert of Cambligneul.⁶² In Karl's view,⁶³ Robert was most probably from the same region as the author of *Elizabeth B*.

Summary

You who are anxious to go to Paradise, listen to the story of Saint Elizabeth [Ysabel]. She was the daughter of Andrew, the King of Hungary, and of Gertrude, who was to die at the hands of her own brothers. (ll. 1–102)

Elizabeth inherited many virtues from her mother. Since childhood, she showed compassion toward the poor and gave clothes to the destitute. At seven years of age, she was entrusted to the care of a servant, one Gode, who was to testify during the canonization process. Elizabeth liked nothing better than to pray, and was often mocked by her young companions. She had acquired her taste for the cloistered life in her mother's womb, and was much devoted to Saint John. At twelve years of age, she would go to church in simple garments. [Breaking his story, Robert here talks of Conrad of Marburg, Elizabeth's future spiritual director, and of his violent demise at the hands of heretics.] In due time, Elizabeth was married to a very noble and pious young man who respected her and her desire to remain chaste. He blamed his companions who suggested that he seek pleasure with other women. He let Elizabeth get up at night in order to pray, and never complained when Ysentruz, Elizabeth's servant, would mistakenly wake him up in the middle of the night. Elizabeth's piety manifested itself in a variety of ways: she regularly asked to be whipped; she taught her neighbors how to lead a devout life away from vanity; and she maintained a life of chastity. One day, her husband invited a passing knight to their home. [The miracle of the divine garments follows.] Struck by the event, her husband decided to join a crusade and met his death. (ll. 103–1289)

Based on Ysentruz's testimony, we know that Elizabeth continued to lead a devout life after her husband's death: she took care of a beggar, visited the ill, comforted poor women, and showed only generosity and compassion. One time, she had to decline Conrad's order to come and hear him give a sermon. Greatly angered at her refusal, Conrad had her harshly beaten. Elizabeth never ceased to take care of the sick and to welcome poor and abandoned children: she would tend to them as to her own children, feeding, washing, and loving them in the spirit of the Gospel. The Devil inspired Elizabeth's barons to steal her domain from her and to leave her destitute. She was soon forced to send her own children away. To a bishop marvelling at her mode of life, she told of the joy to be found in poverty. (ll. 1290–2020)

Then came the time of her death, which she knew would take place before that of Conrad. Welcomed by some Brother Minors, she fell ill and on the twelfth day died, after singing a last and most celestial chant. From her body, an odor of sanctity emanated. Many miracles were performed at her tomb: a monk from Citeaux found himself cured, along with a twelve-year-old boy, a ten-year-old girl, an infant, a blind child, a disabled lass, a deformed maiden, another blind infant, a drowned man, two cripples, a five-year-old child, another deformed maiden, a sick nun, and both the pregnant wife of a knight and her fetus. May Elizabeth pray to God for us, and may Brother Robert of Cambigneul, who composed this poem, write other such works so as to deserve eternal glory. (ll. 2021–2280)

The Life of Saint Euphrosina

“Nove chançon vos dimes de bele antiquité”

One of the many medieval tales inspired by the motif of transvestism, the story of Euphrosina (or Euphrosyna), which has an eastern origin, narrates how a young woman is led to dress as a man. The author of *Euphrosina* wrote this poem in the traditional epic style: thus, *Euphrosina* comprises 1,279 alexandrine lines grouped in 10-line rhyming stanzas. The poem is contained in four manuscripts.⁶⁴

A complete edition of *Euphrosina* was published by Hill,⁶⁵ who gives an extensive account of the manuscripts, of the author of the poem, and of his probable source.⁶⁶ From northern France, this Picard or Walloon poet was probably a Benedictine (given the fact that he has his heroine enter that order) who composed his poem as early as 1200. According to another critic, the author could even have been a Benedictine nun.⁶⁷ Scholars agree to consider the Latin *Vita* narrated in the *Vitae Patrum*⁶⁸ as the source of this poem, which is marked by the usual picturesque details⁶⁹ and dramatized story line⁷⁰ characteristic of hagiographic romance.

Most of the scholars who have studied *Euphrosina* see strong parallels between this legend and that of Alexis. Storey considers as “an odd quirk of fate” the fact that Saint Alexis, “always so fearful of female company [. . .] should appear in the same square volume [the Oxford manuscript] as the Life of the beautiful Saint Euphrosine”.⁷¹ Storey then proceeds to compare *Euphrosina* to the eleventh-century *Alexis* (a version other than that contained in the Oxford manuscript) as two examples “stressing the virtues and values of the conventual vocation” (p. 391). It seems, however, more appropriate to compare *Euphrosina* to the thirteenth-century rendition of the Alexis legend as contained in the Oxford manuscript,⁷² since these two poems, although copied in the Oxford manuscript by two different scribes, were composed at approximately the same date. This is precisely what McCulloch endeavors to do, by focusing on the turtledove as an emblem symbolizing in both tales the psychological condition of the saints’ abandoned betrothed.

The legend inspired a number of textual renditions, including five

Latin versions, a number of Greek renditions based on these *Vitae*, and subsequent vernacular narratives in Italian, Catalan, Portuguese, German, and French (our poem, and two fifteenth-century prose accounts).

Little is known about Euphrosina, who might have lived in the first part of the fifth century. She was, however, much honored in the East. She is referred to as Smaragdus in the Latin source and as Emerald in the thirteenth-century French poem, both names evoking a stone or gem. The Euphrosina legend is a variation, among others, of the story of Pelagia the Penitent, a famous harlot nicknamed Margarita because of the fineness of her pearls and who, disguised as a man, ended her life as a repentant recluse. Such a conflation in terms of name and story line accounts for the eventual confusion of Euphrosina with Margaret, Marina, Pelagia (one of the epithets of Aphrodite as goddess of the sea), Apollinaria, and Theodora.⁷³

- 11 We shall recount to you a beautiful story of long ago.
It concerns a maiden: none better ever existed.
This fair flower was born in the land of Egypt.
- 14 She was so devoted to God, Our Lord,
That she fled for Him all other kinds of love.
She had care neither for the dowry, nor for the spouse
Whom her father offered her in great honor.
- 18 He was a young man of high nobility, the son of a rich personage.
But she paid no attention to the emperor's son.
She did not want any joy that can turn into sadness.
Her father, Paphnutius, was highly born,
- 22 And of a most honored lineage.
I could not describe the merits of his family.
He married a noble lady from his own land.
They led a very rich existence,
- 26 But had neither a daughter nor a son.
Paphnutius was anguished and obsessed by this.
His wife, wiser, attempted to reason with him.
Still, her own sorrow was very great.
- 30 They both were saddened by their lack of heir.

(Paphnutius visits the abbot of a monastery, gives him great alms and asks the abbot, Theodosius, to pray on his behalf.)

- 81 God loved the abbot and his abbey deeply.
Thus the abbot's prayers were answered,
And Paphnutius' alms well received.
- 84 A daughter was born. Since the Virgin Mary,
No maiden ever existed who was as wise and beautiful as she.
Her father and her mother raised her lovingly.

- For seven years, they tended her and cared for her.
 88 In due time, they took her to the abbey,
 So that Theodosius, the abbot, might baptize her.
 She received the Christian name of Euphrosina.
 Euphrosina is now baptized,
 92 Then brought to the altar
 Where the abbot presents her to God.
 He prays that her honor be protected,
 That her beauty may not bring her harm,
 96 And that no man ever rape her.
 Then the abbot hands her over to her father,
 Who takes her back to the city.
 She is then sent to school, and taught well.
 100 Before her twelfth birthday, she becomes well learned.

(Her mother dies suddenly. Euphrosina mourns her, tearing her own clothing and beating her breast. These gestures reveal her wealth and beauty, and all the young men of the city seek her as a bride.)

- 151 In the city, there was a very powerful count,
 Extremely rich, and highly regarded.
 His lineage was very honorable, and his possessions very secure.
 154 He had but one son, more handsome than anyone.
 Feeling old and nearing his end,
 The count wanted his son to marry.
 Coming to Paphnutius, he presented his request,
 158 And Paphnutius consented.
 He promised to give his daughter to the count's son,
 Thinking that there was no better suitor for her in the whole land.
 And thus Euphrosina is betrothed to the count's son.
 162 Paphnutius closes the agreement with an olive branch,
 As a symbol of their alliance,
 And a promise of peace and harmony between them.
 The young man gives her a golden ring,
 166 Adorned with the most precious gems,
 And an amethyst of the highest value.
 He puts it on her neck, then wants to kiss her,
 But she refuses to let him kiss her.
 170 She wants to give her body to God.
 The days pass, and the time of the wedding approaches.
 The young man is most impatient.
 The days and nights seem too long for him.
 174 He longs for the experience of pleasure.
 As for her, the noble maiden is grieving.
 She calls on God, the spiritual King:
 "Lord," she says, "have pity! Keep me from evil!"

- 178 It is true that you have created the institution of marriage.
 But You were yourself born of a virgin.
 Virginity and marriage cannot be combined.”

(Euphrosina is determined never to marry. With the help of one of Theodosius' monks, she decides to become a Benedictine nun.)

- 434 Fair Euphrosina cannot envisage marrying,
 So great is her desire to serve God.
 Love and piety fill her heart.
 Having prepared the cloth of her habit, she welcomes the monk.
- 438 He cuts her hair and dresses her as a nun.
 She wants to obey the Rule of Saint Benedict.
 She wants to be God's spouse and to flee the world.
 The monk who shaves and blesses her
- 442 Is himself filled with joy.
 Her piety makes him weep without restraint.
 Having thus welcomed her to the service of God,
 The monk changes her name, and calls her Emerald,
- 446 A name that can be given to a man or a woman.
 'Emerald' refers to a very precious and beautiful gem.
 She is indeed as close to God as a gem in a ring,
 For she is His spouse, His friend, and His servant.
- 450 Her complexion is fresh and young.
 Where goes the Spouse, there too goes the maiden.
 She becomes one of the jewels of God's crown.
 None was as beautiful in Solomon's temple.
- 454 Now Emerald is married and entrusted
 To God, Our Lord, the Son of Holy Mary.
 She will always remain His companion and His friend.
 The monk who has shaven and clothed her
- 458 Prays to God that He protect her,
 That nothing ever take her away from Him,
 And that Satan never harm her.
 He entrusts her to God, who has welcomed her.
- 462 She tells him to return to the abbey,
 For fear that her father learn about this and prevent her from
 answering her calling.
 Euphrosina is a nun. Her father does not know it,
 And neither does the young man who loves her more than all the
 gold of Syria.
- 466 The monk departs, who has betrothed her to God.
 She remains, wondering how to keep hidden her new mode of life.
 If she goes to the nuns, in a convent,
 She might well be found and taken by force,
- 470 And given to the young man. She would then be dishonored.

But she cannot go away from her land.
 She cannot leave alone without risking shame,
 Nor does she want to take along a male companion.
 If she were to ask for advice, she might well be betrayed.

[. . .]

- 485 But Saint Sophia came and counseled her.
 She will remain faithful to her chosen Order,
 But she will not be able to live as a nun.
 488 Rather, she will throw away the female habit,
 And join the monks of the monastery
 Clothed as a man, so as not to be discovered.
 She resolves to do so, and acts accordingly.
 492 Throwing away her Benedictine habit, she dresses as a knight.
 And she is now well disguised and unrecognizable.

(Presenting herself as the knight "Emerald," Euphrosina is welcomed by the abbot and entrusted to Agapiton, a monk of high piety.)

- 564 When Euphrosina was dressed and properly attired,
 Agapiton, her spiritual master, received her.
 He took her to the church of the monastery.
 Her flesh was white, her face highly colored,
 568 Her eyes clear and bright, and her mouth beautiful.
 The whole congregation is greatly consumed by this sight.
 Erotic thoughts start invading them.
 The younger monks stare at her as at a fabulous creature,
 572 Thinking: "Where does this creature come from?"
 The wise monks have exposed the danger to the abbot.
 They tell him: "Take this eunuch out of our sight.
 It is not really a eunuch, but Satan himself,
 576 Attempting to cause us to fall into his traps.
 If this creature stays a day or two amid our young monks,
 Things will happen that will bring us sorrow."
 Hearing them, the abbot becomes fearful.
 580 He calls for Emerald, and tells her privately:
 "Son, your beauty is such that it inspires desire
 And makes young and old men lustful.
 You will remain in your cell, and will not mix with us."
 584 Having told this to her, he then calls Agapiton:
 "Prepare a cell for yourself and your disciple.
 Arrange it so that it be proper,
 And provided with books and a chapel.
 588 But do not let him out; his face is too beautiful.
 I do not want him anywhere but in this new cell.
 Our brothers have already started a fight over him.
 They are moved by him as by a woman.

- 592 We must therefore take him away from them.
My decision is final."

(Thus it is done. Meanwhile, both Paphnutius and the abandoned betrothed lament the disappearance of Euphrosina. Remembering Euphrosina's deep piety, the father of the betrothed suggests that they search for her in nearby convents. Paphnutius goes to Theodosius, who sends him to Emerald's cell, hoping that this most spiritual monk will comfort the lamenting father.)

- 932 The abbot calls for Emerald's keeper
And tells him: "This lord here is most despaired
For having lost his daughter, who disappeared.
Take him to Emerald's cell.
936 Let him talk with your disciple."
Agapiton asks for the door of the cell to be opened.
Emerald knew nothing of it, until she saw her father come in.
She recognizes him, and starts to cry.
940 Tears fall from her eyes
Along her white face and down to her bosom.
Paphnutius, who does not recognize her, does not know what to
think.
How could he imagine that his daughter has become a monk?
944 Her seclusion has made her pale and thin,
Because of the privations and sufferings.
He approaches her, then hesitates.
She pulls down on her hood, so as to hide herself.
948 Agapiton nods to her to speak.
He tells her in Latin: "This is the lord Paphnutius,
Who has lost the daughter for whose recovery you have prayed.
Our abbot sends him to you. Try to comfort him!"

(Emerald promises him that he will see his daughter again, and enjoins him to be patient. His daughter is well; she has chosen the best mode of life by giving up terrestrial love.)

- 1011 Hearing the voice of the maiden,
Paphnutius finds it softer than the sound of a harp,
And sweeter than spice or cinnamon.
1014 He feels that he must leave the cell,
As he starts to weep for his daughter's soul.
Departing from the chapel,
He goes to the abbot and says:
1018 "Lord, I thank you: I heard wonderful words,
And they gave me a renewed joy.
Indeed, this monk is filled with God's grace.
His sweet speech has soothed me,

- 1022 And given me back my heart and reason,
 In such a way that I almost forgot my pain
 And that I felt strongly moved by this monk.
 Tears came to my eyes, so that I had to leave the cell.
- 1026 But it is time now for me to go: give me your blessing!"
 The abbot raises his hand and blesses him.
 Paphnutius kneels and kisses his foot.
 They both weep and bid each other farewell.
- 1030 Emerald served God very well.
 For thirty years, she lived in the cell.
 She has worked for God deservingly.
 Her body has changed, becoming ugly
- 1034 On account of fasting and cold.
 Privations finally affect her body. She takes to her bed.
 But if her body weakens, her soul is stronger than ever,
 For no frailty can assail her spirit.
- 1038 The good master Agapiton serves her,
 Rejoicing over her good life and good end.
 All that time, Paphnutius would often come to the abbey,
 Showing his generosity to the good monks.
- 1042 When he hears that Emerald has taken to her bed,
 He asks the abbot's permission to go and see the recluse.
 When he sees her in bed, he is greatly perturbed.
 He kisses her eyes, hands, and feet.
- 1046 Softly, he weeps: "Brother, do not leave me!
 I will be lost and anguished without you.
 Your death will bring me great sadness.
 You were such a comfort in my own suffering.
- 1050 Friend, this suffering would start again.
 As long as I hear you, I do not feel pain.
 Your words brought me sweetness.
 May your soul blossom among the innocent!
- 1054 May you never see the angels of darkness!
 May the envoys of Hell never frighten you!
 May Michael take you to the realm of bliss!
 May holy Abraham's bosom welcome you!
- 1058 May all the apostles, martyrs and confessors
 Present you joyfully to Our Lord!
 Friend, now my anguish will start anew,
 And so will the pain I have endured for thirty years,
- 1062 When I lost my beloved daughter.
 You had promised me that patience
 Would eventually bring her back to me. But I still await her.
 I had high hopes, but this was foolish of me.
- 1066 Now I am to lose you, whom she resembled so much.
 I in fact never saw two beings so similar, even among twins.

- On her account and yours, I will forever grieve.
 I will go to Hell, weeping and lamenting.”
- 1070 The maiden is anguished to see such pain.
 She sees her father weeping and crying,
 And tells him: “Why kill yourself that way? Do you not trust me?
 Do you not believe that God has the power
- 1074 To give your daughter back to you?
 Remember how Jacob cried over
 Joseph, when he was sold to a foreign country.
 He wept over his death, but saw him as a king.
- 1078 I ask you to wait by me for three days.
 Do not depart before I talk to you.”
 Paphnutius remains three days, sad and mournful,
 Serving the sick recluse as a close friend.
- 1082 He does not wish to depart,
 Thinking in his heart: “I hope that, in three days,
 I will hear and see what I have awaited for so long.
 God has told the truth to this man,
- 1086 But he does not want to reveal it yet, fearing to be admonished.
 He will not let it be known as long as he lives,
 But, once he is in the glory of Heaven,
 He will send an angel to reveal the truth.”
- 1090 Time passes, and the third day arrives.
 Paphnutius kneels before the recluse
 And says: “I have waited as required.
 I have stayed here; I now beg you to help me.”
- 1094 Emerald knows that her service to God
 Has been accepted, and that her time has come.
 God is calling her, on account of her merits.
 “Lord,” she says, “You who have been my Advocate and my Shield,
- 1098 Who have helped me conquer this life
 And fulfill my desires and wishes,
 Lord, I thank you for Your protection.
 I now await the promised crown.
- 1102 You will soon give me the reward I have desired for so long.
 I expect and trust this, for You tell the truth,
 And always keep Your promise.
 I have kept here my terrestrial father,
- 1106 Who has suffered and wept for so long.
 Lord, in Your compassion, comfort him!”
 Then, turning to her father,
 She says: “Do not grieve any longer over your daughter.
- 1110 Do not grieve, for I am she.
 I am the beloved daughter that you raised as a child,
 And that you put to school in your chapel.
 I am Euphrosina. I am this fair maiden.

- 1114 But, if you ever loved me, do not reveal it.
Do not say anything to our count, or to anyone!
Beware that no one—free men, servants, or maidens—see me!
I want you to prepare my body for burial, in my present garment.
- 1118 And promise me that, afterwards,
You will place my mother's tomb at my left.
When I came to this abbey, I promised the abbot
To give him the land in Egypt that I had inherited,
- 1122 And that, if God allowed me to stay here,
I would bequeath it to the brothers.
Fulfill my promise, Lord, in God's name!
I do not want to be blamed for not keeping my word.
- 1126 Now death is coming. Pater, ora pro me!"
- At these words, she gives to God
The soul that she had wisely protected in this world.
Saint Michael takes her soul to God.
- 1130 Her father hears these words, and is anguished.
He sees death taking her, and cries out.
He faints and falls down, colorless.
Hearing his shouts, Agapiton runs back.
- 1134 He sees Emerald dead on the bed
And Paphnutius lying down, lifeless.
He throws cold water on him, and tells him:
"What is it, Lord Paphnutius? Are you asleep?"
- 1138 A wise man should not be dismayed by this happening."
With difficulty, the father regains consciousness.
His heart is so heavy that he still feels weak.
Then he realizes what happened, sighs deeply,
- 1142 And looks at the bed where the body is lying.
He sees the good master weeping and becoming pale.
Then he says: "Agapiton, let me sleep here!
I heard something which I never could have imagined hearing.
- 1146 Earth, open up! Swallow me
And take me within you, instead of carrying me!
Hell, open your mouth, and engulf me!"

(Paphnutius mourns at length the beautiful face and body of his daughter. Meanwhile, Agapiton fetches the abbot. The burial takes place. A one-eyed monk is miraculously cured; everyone comes to honor the holy virgin.)

- 1229 Paphnutius has ordered a most beautiful tomb,
Made of marble and handsomely crafted.
He has the life of his daughter written.
- 1232 He will never forget her, as long as he lives.
Paphnutius mourns his loss, according to Nature,
But Theodosius rejoices at this wonderful event.

- The abbot makes sure that relics are gathered,
 1236 And that the truth of her story is recounted,
 A story so refined and so pure
 That no word could do it justice.
 Having buried and mourned his daughter,
 1240 Paphnutius gives great alms in her honor,
 Bequeathing to every single church in town,
 Without forgetting any of its poor.
 He now brings to the abbot Theodosius
 1244 The inheritance of his daughter.
 Then, he settles in his daughter's cell,
 Lying on the mattress where he found her.
 He lives here for two years, spending his days
 1248 Without expensive clothes, and without washing himself.
 The abbey becomes praised and famous thanks to him.
 He stays here as a monk, for the rest of his life,
 So obedient that he not once has to be called to order.
 1252 Lord Theodosius, you loved and served him.
 You took care of him alive, then buried him
 In a tomb of marble, engraved with flowers.
 May you and he be good advocates for us before God!
 1256 And you, holy maiden, call on Him
 That He be merciful and compassionate toward us.
 And at the time when He will judge the living and the dead,
 May He forgive us our sins and welcome us to Paradise.
 1260 Lady Euphrosina, God's spouse and friend,
 I knew neither your name nor your Life.
 I saw it written in a learned book,
 Simply recounted by some ancient clerics.
 1264 And when I read it, I received your protection.
 My love for you inspired me to retell it in the vernacular.
 I did not write it in the high style of courtesy,
 But I wanted your story to be heard.
 1268 My greatest desire is that other people love you too.
 In this world, I only want your company.
 Receive my humble work, in the name of pure love.
 It may not be perfect, but I have done it out of devotion.
 1272 Pray to God for me, our dear Redeemer,
 That He have pity on me, the poor sinner,
 And forgive me my weaknesses and my sins,
 And that He protect me in this world from the Deceiver
 1276 So that I may—through fasting and weeping,
 On account of my sins—reach my Judge.
 And you, holy maiden, pure thing, sweet flower,
 May you meanwhile look upon my good will and my work. Amen.

The Life of Saint Faith

“Seignurs, vous que en Deu creez”

The *Life of Saint Faith*, which contains 1,242 octosyllabic lines in rhyming couplets, is preserved in a single manuscript.⁷⁴ In the fourteenth century, this manuscript belonged to the Augustinian nuns’ community of Campsey in Suffolk and was used for mealtime reading.⁷⁵ The author, Simon of Walsingham, lived at the Benedictine monastery of Bury St. Edmunds (Suffolk), where there was a chapel dedicated to Saint Faith.⁷⁶ Simon’s birthplace—Walsingham (Norfolk)—was located near the priory of Horsham, also dedicated to Saint Faith. Moreover, as he tells us in this poem (ll. 53–56), the author was born on the saint’s feast day. All these facts account for Simon’s devotion to Saint Faith.

The author also tells us about his cousin, Thomas of Walsingham, a learned monk at Bury St. Edmunds, who played an important role in the nomination of Hugo as the abbot of the monastery, sometime between 1211 and 1215.⁷⁷ According to Baker, Simon composed his poem probably between 1210 and 1216, around the time of Hugo’s election. Legge disagrees and dates the *Life* during a more peaceful time, about 1205–1210, when the abbot Samson, a man well versed in Latin and French, sponsored many works “which could glorify the abbey in the eyes of the laity.”⁷⁸ Simon indeed addresses his poem to a noble lay public, while repeatedly asking for the forgiveness of his listeners as he confesses his lack of familiarity with the French language.

Legge identifies the three Latin Passions which may have been Simon’s sources.⁷⁹ Simon might also have used a compilation of those Latin versions, the “Latin” text sent to him by “Dom Benjamin” (l. 444). Baker suggests that Benjamin might have been the librarian at the Horsham priory. But Legge⁸⁰ sees no reason why Benjamin could not be the librarian at Bury St. Edmunds, since it is reasonable for a monastery with a chapel dedicated to Saint Faith also to possess Latin copies of her *Life*.

The fame of Saint Faith in England,⁸¹ while much more developed in France, was still limited at the time when Simon composed his poem. The

first martyr of the city of Agen (Lot), Faith lived and died in the third century. In the fifth century, Dulcitius, the bishop of Agen, had a church built in honor of her relics. These were stolen in the ninth century by the monk Arinidus who brought them to the nearby abbey of Conques. In the eleventh century, the Conques church was rebuilt and expanded since it had by then become an important stopover on the way to Compostella. In 1034, some of the relics were brought to Normandy,⁸² where Roger of Tosny established the Benedictine abbey of Conches.

The founding in 1105 of the Horsham priory resulted from a visit by Robert Fitz-Walter and his wife to both Conques and Conches. On their return from a pilgrimage to Rome, they had been attacked and imprisoned, then miraculously saved through their prayers to Saint Faith. Taking back with them two monks from either Conques or Conches, they arranged the creation of the Horsham priory, which they dedicated to Saint Faith.

The earliest vernacular Life is an eleventh-century poem composed in the language of southern France.⁸³ This Provençal rendition is of direct interest to the history of the hagiographic tradition in northern France. Acknowledging his desire to write the Life of the saint *a lei francesca* ("according to the French conventions"), the author thus attests to the vitality of eleventh-century French hagiography, although no record—except for the earliest rendition of *Alexis*—has survived from that period.⁸⁴ An interesting analysis of the Provençal poem is that of Segre,⁸⁵ who underscores the structural parallels between the age of the heroine (martyred in her twelfth year) and the eleven scenes of the poem.

The cult of Saint Faith flourished in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, through the increasing prestige of the Conques abbey. Throughout France, she became as popular as Mary of Lourdes is today.⁸⁶ Despite her young age, Faith is never represented as a young maiden but always as a mature matron. One such example is the eleventh-century reliquary preserved at Conques, a statue that depicts Faith sitting in a hieratic and royal attitude. Her main emblems are the rack, the sword, and the dove.

- Lords, you who believe in God
 And whose faith is firmly established,
 You have heard, if I am not mistaken,
 4 And you know for a certainty,
 That no one in this world,
 Whether old or young, of small or high condition,
 Will be safe, if he does not believe.
 8 This is the truth, without a doubt.

- [The virtue of] faith will save us,
 And will lead us to enjoy Heaven.
 For this reason, if you are so disposed,
- 12 It is worthwhile for you to hear
 And to discover the story of Saint Faith,
 And to praise her great virtues.
 For the more you hear about the virtue of faith,
- 16 The more your own faith will become firm.
 I therefore ask you to hear me now
 As I speak to you about Saint Faith
 —A most holy and fair maiden,
- 20 And even more beautiful in terms of her faith—
 And about her holy life, her martyrdom,
 And her holy devotion to God.
 Her name indeed mirrored
- 24 The way she led her life.
 More so than the gem in the ring,
 Both her name and her life
 Were united and one,
- 28 In a most holy harmony.
 And when her tormentor asked for her name,
 She herself emphasized this resemblance,
 As you will soon hear
- 32 If you pay attention.
 To those who will hear this story,
 I ask for forgiveness, in God's name,
 If I make any mistakes.
- 36 My endeavor is bold indeed,
 Since I am not very learned,
 Nor very fluent in the French language.
 I am also frail and sinful,
- 40 And inclined at all times to do evil,
 In words, acts, or thoughts.
 It is therefore daring on my part
 To attempt to speak about Saint Faith
- 44 And to celebrate her in any way.
 But you will forgive me, knowing
 The extent of my devotion
 To this most praiseworthy of maidens,
- 48 Second only to the Virgin Mary.
 I will tell you the reason
 And will explain to you
 Why I must honor, love,
- 52 And serve her with particular care.
 Indeed, on the night when we commemorate her death
 —A most special time of veneration,

- In honor of the moment when she was freed from her travails—
 56 I was myself born to mine.
 On the day when her torments took end,
 Mine started.
 On the day when she received joy and honor,
 60 I received suffering and pain.
 She was welcomed to bliss and happiness,
 When I was welcomed to weeping and sadness.
 I am now enduring the burden of existence,
 64 And hoping that
 She will assist me during this life,
 And inspire my present endeavor.
 Saint Faith, may you grant this to many
 68 And may you come to their aid!
 May her prayers
 Allow me to enjoy one day the eternal bliss
 To which she was welcomed,
 72 On the day corresponding to my own birthday!
 In this hope I will begin to tell you my story.
 May God make me benefit from it.
 I have told you one of the reasons
 76 Why I am confident of Faith's mercy.
 I will now give you a second reason
 Why I wish to praise her.
 A friend of mine,
 80 Most learned and most wise,
 Short in stature
 But tall in virtue,
 Asked me
 84 —A fellow countryman of his—
 To write this Life
 In God's honor and in praise of Faith,
 God's friend.
 88 With love in my heart,
 I proceeded to compose this narrative.
 May God bless
 All those who will possess my text
 92 And who will wish to hear it.
 Since my narrative is in French,
 It will be understood by those who do not know Latin.
 Lords, I ask you in God's name
 96 To remember me.
 When you pray to Saint Faith,
 May you invoke my name before God.
 I am Simon of Walsingham,
 100 The servant of Mary, at Bury St. Edmunds.

- When you read my name,
 May you remember me in your prayers,
 And may you pray to God, to His mother Mary,
 104 And to Saint Faith—God's friend—on my behalf,
 That through her holy intercession
 You and I may join her in the kingdom of her Father.
 I will now briefly narrate to you
 108 —As much as my Latin permits me—
 The story of Saint Faith's martyrdom
 And how Jesus took her with Him.
 In those days, Maximian
 112 And the evil Diocletian
 Were emperors of Rome.
 They had no love for God,
 But served
 116 And obeyed the Devil.
 Above all they hated
 Jesus Christ and the Christians.
 At that time, there was
 120 In the city of Agen,
 A most honorable maiden,
 The fairest in all the country,
 And the most noble
 124 Of all the women of the land.
 Her face was beautiful,
 And her heart even more so.
 Fair Faith was her name,
 128 And faith became her destiny.
 Her name was given to her by Jesus Christ,
 When He put faith in her heart
 So that the example of her piety
 132 Might inspire many to follow her steps.
 Indeed Saint Faith was the first one
 To carry the banner of martyrdom
 In the fair city of Agen,
 136 Whose gem Faith became.
 Her faith led her to to endure martyrdom
 And many torments.
 Her faith also crowned her as a queen
 140 Selected by God to suffer martyrdom.
 The most blessed Faith
 Was endowed with all virtues.
 Young of age,
 144 She was not young in courage.
 Her wish was to know God,
 Rather than to be wealthy.

- She loved chastity over gold,
 148 Humility over riches.
 She hated sin, cupidity,
 Ugly deeds, and dishonorable acts.
 God's grace was in her,
 152 Which protected her from evil,
 And inspired her to flee the world,
 And to love and serve God.
 God inspired her to hate the flesh
 156 And to despise material pleasures.
 Saint Faith, God's friend,
 Thus led a holy life,
 Praying, fasting,
 160 And doing many good and devout deeds.
 And through His mercy, Jesus Christ
 Rewarded her efforts
 By crowning her as a martyr
 164 And taking her to the bliss of Heaven.
 I will now tell you how all this happened.
 Listen most carefully!
 The emperors that I have named earlier
 168 —Two tyrants filled with meanness,
 Who hated the Christians
 And tormented them endlessly—
 Had a prefect, God's enemy,
 172 Who served as their representative throughout the empire.
 Known by the name of Dacian,
 He was a most cruel pagan.
 Mean, wicked, and perverse,
 176 He was also jealous and vain.
 This Dacian hated all forms of virtue,
 And hated God most of all.
 This traitor travelled throughout the land
 180 In search of God's friends, whom he tormented.
 Thus the Devil led Dacian
 To the city of Agen.
 The Devil was master in the town,
 184 Which he had entirely in his power.
 When Dacian arrived
 In the city of Agen,
 He had all the people gathered,
 188 As he wanted to know
 Who were the most noble of the city
 And whether they were willing to honor the gods.
 Those who would sacrifice to the gods
 192 Would receive his praise and reward,

- Would be put under his protection,
 And would be assured of his love.
 But those who, humble or noble,
 196 Would refuse to obey him
 And, invoking the name of Jesus Christ,
 Would not sacrifice to the gods,
 Would be tormented
 200 And put to death.
 Thus some Christians were taken
 And bound,
 While others tried to hide
 204 Out of fear.
 This evil tyrant
 Had heard much about
 Saint Faith, the glorious maiden
 208 And most worthy woman,
 Since her renown
 Was great throughout the country.
 She was like a gem
 212 Shining and bright, as I have said.
 The fame of glorious Saint Faith
 —The light of this precious gem—
 Was praised and honored
 216 Throughout the country.
 The tyrant had much desire
 To extinguish it. In vain,
 For the more he tried,
 220 The brighter she became,
 As you will soon discover
 In the course of the narrative.
 Dacian asked that Faith
 224 Be brought before him,
 For he wanted to hear directly from her
 Whether she was willing to renounce her faith.
 He wanted to see whether he could,
 228 Through threats or enticements,
 Take her away from the holy faith
 And convert her to the evil one.
 Dacian was indeed very mistaken
 232 To summon the maiden in this way.
 When Faith learned that she was thus called,
 She knew what to expect.
 Yet she did not try to hide out of fear,
 236 But courageously presented
 Herself before him.
 She had no dread of the tyrant

- Because of her faith in Jesus
 240 And in her own virtue.
 She therefore took care
 To pray, before going to Dacian,
 Whom she did not fear,
 244 And whose threats she did not heed.
 In this way she displayed the faith
 Which was symbolized by her holy name of Faith.
 A mirror of her name,
 248 Her prayer to Jesus was filled with piety.
 Sweetly, she addressed to Him
 The following words:
 "Fair Lord, glorious Jesus,
 252 You who came for our salvation,
 Who were born of the Holy Virgin,
 And who died out of Your love for us,
 Fair Lord, glorious Jesus,
 256 May You give me grace and virtue,
 Wisdom and knowledge,
 To enable me to confound Your enemy,
 So that all those who will hear of me
 260 Can take example."
 Having thus prayed,
 Faith armed herself with the holy cross,
 And came before Dacian,
 264 Who loved neither God nor Christians.
 When God's friend and spouse
 Arrived before her judge,
 The evil man looked at her
 268 And marvelled at her beauty.
 Presently he asked her:
 "Tell me your name, do not hide it."
 The fair maiden was not afraid,
 272 And she did not hide her name,
 But answered most readily
 And very courteously:
 "I do not wish to hide my name;
 276 I am called Faith, I dare say.
 And there is no gap
 Between my name and my faith.
 Faith is my creed, and also my name.
 280 Name or creed, it is one and the same."
 Dacian, the evil and wicked pagan,
 Then replied:
 "Now that you have stated your name,
 284 I want to know about your religion,

- About your faith, and about your creed.
 I want to know this at once.”
 And Saint Faith, God’s friend,
 288 Filled as she is with the Holy Spirit,
 Now answers her judge
 And says: “I do not intend
 To hide either my faith or my creed.
 292 I have been a Christian since childhood.
 And when I was baptized
 In the name of God,
 I gave myself totally to Jesus
 296 —Who suffered death for us—
 To Jesus Christ, Mary’s Son,
 Who is the Lord of the world.
 I give myself to Him, I surrender to Him,
 300 To Him I belong forever.”
 When Dacian hears this,
 He feels much anger,
 But does not show his cruelty,
 304 Choosing instead to speak leniently.
 But he shows indulgence
 Only as a means of luring Faith
 Out of her creed.
 308 Hence the soft tone of his reply:
 “Fair maiden,
 You are so beautiful
 That I take pity on you
 312 And am giving you this advice:
 Beautiful maiden,
 Endowed with such grace
 And such youth,
 316 Stop here this madness!
 Abandon your religion,
 Which is nothing but nonsense,
 And go offer sacrifice
 320 And prayers to Saint Diana.
 You must honor her,
 The goddess of love.
 Believe me and adore her,
 324 Who shares with you the same nature.
 And if you follow my advice,
 You will be greatly rewarded.
 I will bestow on you honors and gifts
 328 In the name of Diana’s love.
 If you adore the goddess,
 You will never want of wealth.”

- But Saint Faith, God's friend,
 332 Holding these words for foolishness,
 Answers him wisely
 And proudly:
 "From the Scriptures, I have learned,
 336 Through the wise men of yore
 Who spoke God's words,
 That your gods are devils.
 They are nothing but evil,
 340 And have neither virtue nor strength.
 They have mouths that cannot speak,
 Hands that cannot hold,
 Ears that cannot hear,
 344 Eyes that cannot see,
 Feet that cannot move.
 These gods are lifeless,
 And yet you want me
 348 To adore your wicked gods!"
 When the tyrant hears her,
 He becomes enraged
 And casts an evil glance
 352 Toward the maiden.
 Listen to what he now tells her:
 "You have gravely insulted my gods
 By saying that they are devils
 356 And have no power.
 I will avenge them.
 And if you refuse to sacrifice,
 I will do two things:
 360 I will force you to your knees,
 And I will make you endure
 Many deadly torments."
 When Saint Faith, God's friend,
 364 Graced with God's faith,
 Hears these threats,
 She answers him:
 "Know, lord tyrant,
 368 That I care not about your menace.
 In Christ's name I can endure
 Pains, torments, and even death.
 He died for me,
 372 And I can also die for Him.
 Our Lord Jesus Christ
 Was born for His love for us.
 For us He suffered the Cross,
 376 And for our sins was put to death.

- This is why I am now eager
 To suffer death in His name.”
 When her tormentor hears this,
 380 A violent rage invades him.
 He orders his soldiers
 To bring a metal bed
 And a rack that he had devised
 384 To torture God’s friends.
 Saint Faith is then disrobed
 And laid upon the bed.
 The naked maiden
 388 Is tied down.
 Her frail body is stretched
 By those who hate God’s friends.
 Upon Dacian’s order,
 392 A fire is kindled under her.
 The cruel soldiers light it
 With burning rods.
 The fire is fed with grease,
 396 Thrown in the flames by these evil men,
 Who kindle the fire
 In this way.
 Above it is the maiden,
 400 Frail and helpless.
 She is soon engulfed
 By the fire.
 But she heroically endures
 404 This pain and torment,
 In the name of Jesus our Lord,
 Whom she loves so deeply.
 And He, in His infinite compassion,
 408 Does not forget the maiden.
 He gives her strength and fortitude
 To withstand this ordeal fearlessly.
 Through her sufferings,
 412 The Devil and his associates are vanquished.
 It is impossible to describe
 The horror of her martyrdom.
 Great was the pity
 416 Of the onlookers.
 They voice their anguish aloud,
 And criticize the cruel judgment.
 Loudly, tearfully,
 420 They express their feelings:
 “Ah, what a terrible deed!
 No one has ever heard of such a thing.

- What a cruel punishment!
 424 It has never been done before.
 Alas! Alas! What suffering!
 No one has ever endured greater pains.
 Alas, because of an unjust judgment,
 428 This chaste body, this innocent maiden
 Is cruelly tortured.
 This is a crime, this is a sin,
 Considering that she never wronged anyone,
 432 Never vilified anyone,
 And yet is so ruthlessly tortured.
 How nobly she endures her torment,
 In the name of Jesus Christ, Mary's son!
 436 May He now come to her aid.
 We hereby give ourselves to Him,
 And recognize that we are His.
 Yes, we acknowledge being His,
 440 And hereby renounce our useless gods,
 These lifeless gods unable to move on their own,
 Or to act on our account."
 And thus, my lords—according to the Latin source
 444 Sent to me by Dom Benjamin—
 Many of these witnesses converted on that very day,
 Accepting our Lord
 And abandoning their evil creed
 448 On account of Faith.
 I could not give you their names:
 They do not figure in my source.
 But they became martyrs
 452 And were beheaded for the love of God.
 Lords, on the day
 When Saint Faith endured her Passion
 And the torments that you have heard,
 456 In the name of Christ,
 There was a holy man, God's friend
 —A very religious young man—
 Who had fled from the city.
 460 His name was Capraise.
 Many other Christians
 Had also fled the pagans
 And their persecutions,
 464 And I will tell you why:
 God's friends did not want to see
 The sacrifices these pagans
 Made to the Devil, in spite of Him
 468 Who suffered death for their sins.

- These Christians did not want to be stained
 Nor to witness such infamous acts.
 They did not want to witness
 472 Such despicable deeds.
 They were obeying the advice given by Christ
 To the disciples that He loved,
 Namely: to leave one place after another,
 476 Should pagans be present.
 And He Himself was the first to do
 What He later taught his disciples,
 When he went to Egypt,
 480 Fleeing his persecutor.
 Jesus knew that, when the time would come,
 His disciples would flee
 And go into hiding.
 484 In His infinite compassion,
 He had himself left the country,
 Thus protecting His disciples from blame.
 This is why they were not accused
 488 Of cowardice or dishonor.
 This can serve as an illustration
 That one must escape
 From evil and persecution
 492 According to times and seasons.
 Thus Capraise went away from the city
 And hid himself behind a rock
 In a cavern close by,
 496 Near the town, in the countryside,
 Whence he was able to see
 All that was going on.
 As he was looking toward the city,
 500 He witnessed the great torments
 Undergone by Saint Faith, God's friend,
 In the name of Mary's Son.
 At such a sight, he felt pity
 504 And wept for her.
 And, lifting his hands upwards,
 He prayed to God to have mercy
 On Saint Faith, who in His name
 508 Was enduring such ordeal.
 He asked God to give her strength and courage
 To conquer the fear of fire,
 And to give her victory
 512 And the crown of martyrdom.
 Lying down on the ground,
 Capraise then implored God

- To show him, through a divine miracle,
 5 16 How Saint Faith
 Was withstanding
 The torment of fire.
 And God who never forgets
 5 20 His own, heard his prayers,
 And gave him the divine power to see,
 Through His grace.
 Capraise—the holy martyr
 5 24 Who was soon to endure the same torments,
 In the name of Mary's Son—
 Saw how the maiden, God's friend,
 Was bound to the rack
 5 28 And engulfed by flames.
 And he also saw, coming down from Heaven
 A white dove, as he had never seen before,
 A dove more white and more beautiful
 5 32 Than any known bird.
 No flower in summertime,
 No snow during winter,
 Had he ever seen so white,
 5 36 Or so bright.
 This dove was carrying a golden crown,
 Richer than anything ever seen.
 Adorned
 5 40 With most precious gems
 And costly jewels,
 The crown was shining and radiating light,
 The likes of which not even the sun could surpass,
 5 44 At noon time,
 When its light is at its strongest,
 In the highest point of the sky.
 The dove put this most beautiful crown
 5 48 On the head of the maiden
 Who was enduring such torments,
 And was indeed most deserving.
 Capraise then saw
 5 52 How Faith found herself suddenly clothed
 In a white garment,
 Of the newest and most shiny material.
 Capraise thus realized
 5 56 That Jesus Christ, through His mercy,
 Had already rewarded her
 By giving her eternal glory.
 Capraise understood that her sufferings had ended,
 5 60 And that her bliss had begun.

- The white dove that came down from Heaven
 —As you have just heard—
 Then flew around the holy martyr,
 564 In order to comfort her.
 With its two wings, the dove fanned her,
 Protecting her from the flames.
 Through Jesus' grace,
 568 The dove extinguished the strength and heat
 Of the flames and the rack.
 The ordeal by fire
 Thus ceased, and became like a dew,
 572 So that Faith, the good maiden,
 Felt neither pain nor torment.
 May God be praised!
 When Capraise, the good man,
 576 Was given to see these events,
 He looked at the maiden,
 And saw that she was untouched,
 And that the fire
 580 Had not harmed her.
 She was shining
 Like a star in the sky.
 The crown given to her by Christ
 584 And brought by His angel
 Enhanced her beauty
 And made her look like a star.
 The crown had been brought to her
 588 By God's angel from Paradise.
 When Saint Capraise saw
 The glory and virtue
 Given by Jesus Christ
 592 To Saint Faith, the good maiden,
 He did not wish to hide any longer.
 He now wanted to confront the sufferings
 Endured by Saint Faith, God's friend,
 596 In the name of Mary's Son.
 He knew indeed
 That the ordeal would lead to glory,
 And, on the basis of this certainty,
 600 He was not afraid of death,
 Or of any other torment,
 So great was his love for God.
 He descended from the rock,
 604 Which he struck with his right hand.
 Listen now, my lords, how great was God's love for him,
 And how He displayed it.

- From the rock struck by Capraise's hand,
 608 Water suddenly sprang out.
 A fountain thus appeared,
 Whose water was pure and clear,
 And endlessly running
 612 Down from the rock.
 It is still flowing today,
 According to the author of my source.
 Whoever drinks from it
 616 Is cured
 —If he shows his faith
 And true contrition—
 Thanks to the merits of the martyr
 620 Who once hid behind the rock,
 That is to say, Saint Capraise, the good man.
 As you have just heard,
 Capraise descended from the rock,
 624 Leaving his hiding place
 In order to go where Saint Faith
 Was enduring her ordeal
 And showing the extent of her faith
 628 In accordance with her name.
 No one paid attention to him,
 Nor did anyone notice his arrival,
 As he was approaching the stake
 632 Where Saint Faith was bound to her rack.
 Capraise then started to proclaim loudly
 And to preach Jesus' name,
 Praising Him,
 636 His power, and His virtue.
 Hearing him
 Praise Jesus Christ's name,
 The tyrant ordered that Capraise be seized.
 640 He then proceeded to ask Capraise
 His name and place of birth,
 Asking him also to identify his family and friends.
 Capraise answered fearlessly
 644 With these words:
 "I will tell you my religion,
 And then my name.
 I am a Christian, I am baptized,
 648 And I am called Capraise.
 I am of high birth,
 But above all, I am Jesus' son.
 He made me, created me,
 652 And redeemed me through His blood.

- I am the son and servant of Jesus Christ,
 The Creator of the universe.”
 When the tyrant hears this,
 656 He answers sweetly,
 With feigned meekness:
 “You are very handsome and well born.
 On account of your youth and beauty,
 660 I want to show you my mercy.
 If you are willing to listen to me,
 You will become very rich.
 All the emperors of the world will love you
 664 And will honor you.
 You will be invited to their palaces
 As one of their closest friends.”
 Saint Capraise, the good man,
 668 Who was filled with God’s grace,
 And who was inspired, I believe,
 By Saint Faith’s triumphant end
 —As well as by the glory and virtue
 672 Which he had witnessed—
 Answered at once
 And said to Dacian:
 “In the palace of this Emperor
 676 Who is the Lord of the universe,
 I want to enjoy true honor,
 As everyone should.
 His friends are indeed well received
 680 When they come to His palace.
 Their bliss is without end,
 And will know no limit.
 I recognize as my Emperor
 684 Jesus, our Lord,
 And the high King in Paradise,
 Where He lives eternally with His friends.
 I have loved and served Him since childhood
 688 And I put in Him all my hopes.”
 The tyrant then replied:
 “I ask you to abandon
 Your mad creed,
 692 And to convert to true faith.
 I will give you wealth,
 Rich lands, and towns.”
 To which Capraise answered:
 696 “My faith is in Jesus Christ,
 Who owns all goods,
 And who gives generously

- The gift of salvation
 700 To those who love Him.
 I believe in Him, and I always will.
 I know that He will give me
 —When this mortal life takes end—
 704 The wealth that lasts forever,
 That is, the bliss of Paradise
 Promised to all of His friends.”
 Discovering
 708 The extent of Capraise’s faith,
 And recognizing that he spoke
 And thought very well indeed,
 Dacian realized that he could not win the debate.
 712 He said to his companions:
 “I do not dare confront him,
 Because I might very well not win.
 It is not through words that I can overcome him,
 716 For I will not triumph over him verbally.”
 Dacian then handed Capraise over to his soldiers,
 Ordering them
 To tear his flesh apart
 720 Without pity.
 On his orders,
 These soldiers savagely tormented Capraise.
 The holy martyr, whose body was most handsome,
 724 Whose appearance was striking, and whose faith was great,
 Endured the pains and tortures,
 Rejoicing in his love for God.
 And he kept on preaching,
 728 And talking of God to the people witnessing his ordeal.
 All day long, he praised Jesus’ name,
 His power, and His virtue,
 To those who were around him
 732 And who felt great pity.
 They were weeping for him,
 Whom they loved tenderly.
 Moaning loudly,
 736 In tears, they said:
 “What wrong has he committed,
 He who is condemned to death?
 What an evil judgment it is
 740 To condemn an innocent!
 This saint has only virtues in him.
 Why is he thus tortured?
 Undoubtedly, it is wrong
 744 To condemn him to death.

- The accusation is groundless,
 And the result of a wicked trial.
 What an evil day indeed!
- 748 Alas! Alas! What grief!"
- All those who were there were weeping,
 Seeing his beauty,
 And his courage.
- 752 God's protection was with Capraise,
 So that he looked like an angel,
 So striking was his beauty.
 His flesh was not afflicted
- 756 By the ordeal.
 He was not affected
 By the pain and torment
 Inflicted upon him
- 760 By those who hated God.
 Everyone marveled at his virtue.
 Two brothers were among the spectators.
 The elder was called Primes,
- 764 And the younger Felician.
 Both aspiring
 To the bliss of Paradise,
 They were inspired by the holy fire
- 768 Bestowed by Christ
 On His disciples
 When He sent them the Holy Spirit.
 So deep was the brothers' love for God
- 772 That they felt no fear
 Of Dacian, the evil man,
 Or any other pagan.
 Praising Mary's son,
- 776 They joined Capraise,
 The good man
 Who was enduring tortures in Jesus' name.
 The two brothers went courageously
- 780 To this peril and ordeal,
 Because they too wanted to suffer physical death
 In the name of Him who accepted death for us.
 The three men thus assembled
- 784 In the name of the Holy Trinity.
 God was honored,
 And His Holy Name was glorified.
 In this way, the Devil lost
- 788 His power and virtue.
 And Dacian, the Devil's friend,
 Along with the other pagans,

Felt confused, vanquished,
 792 Vilified, and dishonored.
 Dacian was much angered
 By what I have just related to you.
 Seeing the courage of these two brothers,
 796 How they had offered themselves in sacrifice,
 And how they had shown no fear
 When confronting death, in God's name,
 Dacian knew that they were happy
 800 To suffer death for the love of Jesus.
 Realizing that he would not be able to change their minds
 And to make them recant,
 Dacian, overwhelmed by rage and wickedness,
 804 Began twisting and turning, as a snake does
 When its venom reaches its heart
 And makes it swell.
 And when he saw that he could not win
 808 Through tortures,
 He gave his judgment
 And ordered
 That Saint Faith, God's friend,
 812 Along with the three men,
 Be brought to the temple.
 If they refused to sacrifice to the gods,
 They would be beheaded,
 816 And their bodies would be thrown on the ground.
 Without delay,
 Dacian's orders were carried out.
 Saint Faith, God's friend,
 820 —This bright and shining gem,
 As pure as gold—
 Was purified by this ordeal,
 And so was Capraise, the good man,
 824 As well as the two brothers.
 The four saints, who formed a most holy group,
 In the name of Jesus Christ, Mary's Son,
 Were brought to the temple
 828 And beheaded,
 Since they refused to sacrifice to the false gods
 And to adore them.
 After their sacrifice,
 832 Their bodies were thrown into the streets.
 God received
 Their souls on that very day.
 He welcomed them in His kingdom
 836 And gave them the crown of eternal glory.

The Christians of the city
 Did not stay idle.
 That night, they went secretly
 840 To retrieve, very devoutly,
 The bodies of the glorious martyrs,
 All the while weeping and moaning.
 Covertly, they carried them
 844 And venerated them.
 Their fear was to discover
 That the wicked pagans
 Had already carried the bodies away
 848 And thrown them in deep water,
 So that they could not be found
 And venerated by the Christians.
 But God did not let that happen,
 852 Not wanting the city of Agen
 To lose its most precious treasure:
 Namely, these most glorious martyrs.
 God did not want to see Agen deprived
 856 Of her very own children,
 Who were tortured in the city,
 Where they received the crown of martyrdom.
 Thus, their bodies were kept in Agen,
 860 While their souls ascended to Paradise,
 Joining Jesus Christ.
 Their bodies were kept a long time
 Where they had first been buried,
 864 In the city where they had been tortured.
 Finally, the great wickedness
 Of the pagans was removed.
 God, who in His justice
 868 Gives us peace in His holy Church,
 Allowed Christianity to triumph.
 Then came the days
 When Lucidius became the bishop of Agen.
 872 Such was, I believe, the name
 Of this very famous
 And most devout dignitary.
 In order to honor the saints,
 876 He decided to unearth their bodies.
 A procession was organized,
 With many chants and much devotion,
 During which the bodies were brought
 880 To a church dedicated to them.
 The church had been decorated
 And dedicated

To Saint Faith,
 884 The friend of the High King in Heaven,
 Who had endured martyrdom
 In His name.
 Now her torments have ended
 888 And her bliss has begun.
 May Mary, the Holy Mother of God,
 In whose company Faith is now,
 And May God, in His compassion,
 892 Give us—through Faith's love
 And through her holy intercession—
 The joy of the divine kingdom. Amen.

(The poet now proceeds to narrate how Faith's relics were honored in a church built in Agen; were stolen from Agen and brought to Conques by the monk Arinidus; and were the source of many miraculous cures.)

1225 Up to this very day, Faith shows
 Her holy virtue
 To all those
 1228 Who are ill or sinful.
 If they wish to repent,
 And if they call upon this martyr,
 They are at once purified
 1232 And liberated from sickness and sin.
 May God grant us,
 In His love,
 To be redeemed from the sins
 1236 Which oppress us.
 May God deliver us from damnation,
 Protect us from evil,
 And welcome us in His bliss,
 1240 In the name of this holy martyr
 Whose story we have told.
 Amen, Amen, let us all say.

The Life of Saint Juliana

“Or escoltiez bon crestoiën”

Composed in octosyllabic rhyming couplets, this poem has been edited by Feilitzen⁸⁷ and is preserved in seven manuscripts.⁸⁸

Little is known about this text.⁸⁹ Intertextual evidence suggests that *Juliana* was indeed composed in the thirteenth century, since the poem alludes to “contritionism,” the tearful admission of guilt (see *Juliana*, ll. 830–34). Slow in assimilating the new trends in theology, twelfth-century devotional works in the vernacular tended, rather, to incite the believers to fear the consequences of sin (what is called “attritionism”⁹⁰). A papal Council held at Lateran in 1215 (the Fourth Lateran Council), which recommended that Christians be taught the redeeming value of repentance and confession, was a turning point in this regard. The motif of repentance appeared with increasing frequency in devotional works composed after 1215, while the sacrament of confession became an important narrative theme in works written after 1230. The fact that *Juliana* refers to repentance and not to confession infers that the poem dates from the first third of the thirteenth century.

According to Ardenne, who studies the relationships between the Latin texts and their vernacular adaptations, the source of *Juliana* is a Latin *Vita*.⁹¹ As Garnett points out,⁹² this *Vita* was composed “not later than 568,” when the Lombards invaded Italy, since Juliana’s relics are mentioned as being in Puteoli, rather than in Cumae, where they were taken at the time of the invasion. In 1207, the relics were again transferred and moved to Naples, where they were hidden and lost. At lines 1279–80, the French author states that they are in Asturias, Spain. In so doing, he is probably influenced by the existence of the Santillana convent (i.e., the convent of “Saint Juliana”) near Santander.⁹³ The fame of Saint Juliana in medieval Spain is attested in an anecdote from the *Song of Roland*, when Bramimonde, a pagan character from Spain, is baptized and receives the Christian name of Juliana.⁹⁴

Throughout medieval Europe, the cult of Juliana inspired numerous

- 120 Juliana grew up to be
 A most beautiful and comely maiden.
 It happened that a powerful prince courted her.
 He was a very rich man; his name was Eleusius.
- 124 He was wealthy and powerful,
 On account of his gold, silver, and other goods.
 Juliana's father and her family
 Agreed readily to the prince's request.
- 128 And this caused God's friend
 To be much angered in her heart.
 She had selected her Savior
 As her Lord and Master.
- 132 She was determined never to leave Him for another.
 If marriage was forced upon her, she would rather die.
 Then came the day
 When she was to be given to the pagan.
- 136 The maiden felt great anger in her heart.
 Defiantly, she addressed him in this way:
 "Eleusius, leave me alone!
 What you seek is madness.
- 140 I will never be your spouse
 Until you first become a chancellor
 In the service of our supreme king.
 This is the pledge I am expecting from you."
- 144 God's spouse spoke at length,
 Thus persuading the pagan to leave.
 For the love of the maiden
 Who was so beautiful and courteous,
- 148 He departed
 And went directly to Rome.
 Once there,
 He spoke to the king and to his wife,
- 152 And gave them so much gold and so many riches
 That he was knighted.
 He then returned
 For what he thought would be his wedding.
- 156 He sent a message to Juliana's father,
 That she be prepared for the ceremony.
 And her father sent the answer,
 That he would readily do so.
- 160 Seeing this, God's spouse
 Felt great anger within her heart.
 "Father," she says, "you did wrong
 When you granted this request.
- 164 I will never love this evil man
 Who will end up in Hell.

- I know a King, so perfect and so wise
 That I promised Him my virginity.
 168 He loves me dearly, and I love Him.
 This is why I declare to you
 That I will never take a husband
 Other than this King, as long as I live.”
 172 When African heard her,
 He felt sad and anguished.
 “Daughter,” he says, “I wonder
 Where you received this advice
 176 That inspired you to become a Christian,
 And to abandon the pagan faith.
 Daughter, where is this Husband
 Whom you love secretly?”
 180 The holy virgin answers at once:
 “I recognize Jesus Christ as my Lord,
 He who created you and me from nothing,
 And redeemed us on the Cross.
 184 I have never seen Him, unfortunately,
 But I adore Him, believe me.
 I trust Him completely,
 And fear neither you nor anyone else.”
 188 “Daughter,” he says, “you have lost your senses!
 Your words are cursed.
 You will be treated in such a way
 That you will curse the day when you were born.”
 192 He now takes strong rods,
 Filled with knots and thorns,
 And orders that she be disrobed.
 He rushes toward her to beat her with his two hands.
 196 He cruelly lacerates
 The tender flesh of her white body,
 From the breast down.

(Juliana remains firm in her faith. African hands her over to Eleusius, who first tries a gentle approach, is rebuked, and resorts to tortures. She is hung by her hair, hands tied, and beaten at length. Then, Eleusius has her thrown into a dark jail.)

- 372 A devil, who is so eager to deceive man
 And to inspire us to do evil,
 Was most angry at the maiden
 Who was so faithful to her Lord.
 376 Listen to what this devil did:
 He disguised himself as an angel,
 And came directly to the cell
 Where the maiden was imprisoned.

- 380 He did not show himself in his ugliness,
 But under a beautiful appearance,
 Radiating such brightness
 That the whole cell was lighted.
- 384 He wanted to deceive her in this manner,
 And to confuse and trouble her.
 Hence the disguise he had chosen,
 And the fact that she took him for an angel.
- 388 So glittering was his appearance,
 So beautiful, bright, and shining,
 That the holy rose
 Thought that he was of a holy nature.
- 392 The devil talked to her
 And she listened to him.
 "Maiden," he says, "rejoice,
 And hear me!
- 396 I am a messenger of this Lord
 Whom you call your Creator.
 You have proven to Him
 That you love Him dearly.
- 400 He does not want
 Your tender flesh, your young body, to be tortured any longer.
 But He wants you to take a husband
 And live in peace.
- 404 Accept the pagan at once,
 And serve the gods devoutly.
 Do this now, do not argue,
 For such is the desire of Jesus, your Lord."
- 408 The virgin rejoices at these words,
 And feels much happiness.
 This is how the evil seducer deceived her,
 He who is so crafty.
- [. . .]
- 420 But the maiden was no fool,
 For the Holy Spirit was with her.
 She lay down on the floor
 And prayed to God in Heaven:
- 424 "Lord," she says, "true Savior,
 Father of orphans,
 Compassionate to sinners,
 Physician of the sick,
- 428 Judge of evil men,
 And Advocate of Your servants,
 Good Lord God! Look upon me,
 Who has put my trust in You.

[. . .]

- 438 "Do not let this creature leave
And depart from my cell,
Until I ascertain and know
Who is the sender of this message."
442 At the command of God's Son,
A holy angel appears in the cell,
Who talks to her gently
And gives her this response:
446 "Good virgin," says the angel,
"With your own two hands, seize this devil!
Seize him, he who stands there in front of you!
He came here in order to deceive you,
450 To seduce you,
And to take your virginity.
But he will not succeed in his deceit,
For God is your protector.
454 Take the chain from around your neck,
And put it around his. This will enable you to restrain him,
And to do with him as you please.
He will have no power over you,
458 But will tell you whatever you want to know,
Who he is, and where he comes from."
When the maiden hears the voice,
She crosses herself,
462 Goes toward the devil,
Throws the iron collar around his neck,
And chains him up.
He does not like this at all.
466 He begins to shout,
To jump, and to fight back,
Thinking that he can escape
And destroy the cell in this way.
470 To no avail,
For the maiden holds him tight.

(The devil is thus forced to reveal the name of his master, Beelzebub, and his own, Sathanas. On Juliana's command, he recounts how he inspired Adam, Eve, and Cain to commit their sins. He then describes the torments of Hell.)

- 611 The virgin then says: "Unfortunate
Is he—and cursed be the day of his birth—
Who must enter this evil abode
614 And remain there for a long time!
If you want to be released
And to leave the cell,
You must first tell me more

618 About your evil doings.”

The devil answers: “I have said too much already,
And I regret having disclosed these things to you.”

(But Juliana, who wants him to reveal the tricks he uses to ensnare people, proceeds to force him to do so.)

711 The maiden drags him toward her,
And forces him to his knees.

Standing on his shoulders,

714 She strikes him more than a hundred times.

The devil starts to scream

And to call on Beelzebub:

“Alas! Alas!” he says, “poor me,

718 Whose master is asleep!

He sent me to this cell.

And now, he wrongly allows me to be beaten.”

But when he sees that he cannot escape,

722 And that his master will not rescue him,

“Lady,” he says, “have pity!

I will tell you what you want to know.

When a man gets up early,

726 Dresses, and prepares himself,

And when I clearly perceive

That he is wise and devout

And that he wants to go to church

730 To ask forgiveness for his sins,

I start at once to tempt him

And to lead him astray, in this manner:

I go to his left ear,

734 Put my head close to his and say:

The clerics spend too much time singing the Hours of the liturgy.

When you are there, the time passes too slowly.

You want to return to the work

738 That gives you your daily bread.

It is better to earn one’s living

Than to sing and pray,

Since work allows one to give alms

742 And to care for the poor.

When you have some leisure,

Then will be a good time to go to church.

If I can win him this way

746 And inspire him to go home,

I have much power over his riches

And over him.

- And the one I cannot convince
 750 And deceive with my tricks,
 And who goes to the holy church
 To attend God's service,
 When he stands before the altar
 754 I start inciting him to leave,
 As you will hear,
 By giving him advice and counsel.
 Reminding him of his tasks,
 758 I make him wonder
 Whether he has a legal claim in process,
 Whether his house needs repair,
 Whether his merchandise must be prepared,
 762 Or whether his animals need his care.
 Whatever his concerns,
 I put them in his mind
 So as to distract him from his prayers,
 766 Which become the least of his cares.
 He might still move his lips and teeth,
 His thoughts are now elsewhere.
 And were it not for public opinion,
 770 He would leave at once.
 But the desire to be praised
 Forces him to stay there a long time.
 When he cannot stand it any longer,
 774 He returns home."

(Beating him again, Juliana forces the devil to state how one can resist his temptations. And the devil answers:)

- 811 "When one is in the holy church
 To listen to God's service,
 He should not yawn and be distracted,
 814 But he should concentrate on his prayers to God.
 If I want to make him listen to me,
 He can easily protect himself
 By tracing on his chest, with his fingers,
 818 The sign of the Holy Cross.
 [. . .]
 825 "When he has finished his prayers
 —Whether they are long or short—
 He must not let himself be amused
 828 Or think idle thoughts.
 But he must behave properly,
 Sighing devoutly,
 Looking at the crucifix,

- 832 Remembering how Jesus died for him,
 And weeping over his sins
 Which he can renounce before God.
 In this way, he can confound me
- 836 And conquer me so well
 That I will not dare, from that day on,
 To approach him.
 If you have nothing more to ask,
- 840 Please, let me go now.”
 The virgin says: “Not yet.
 I want to hear more.”
 The devil becomes very anguished,
- 844 Realizing that she is still making demands.
 He falls at her feet,
 For this is too heavy a penalty.
 Juliana says: “I will not
- 848 Forgive you, ever.
 But I will take you outside the city
 And will expose you to the pagans.”
 [. . .]
- 885 The maiden goes out in the street,
 And everyone can see her.
 She holds the chain in her hand.
- 888 The citizens are assembled
 —Townspeople, soldiers,
 Women, and children.
 They all call to her,
- 892 Asking her kindly:
 “Holy and precious virgin,
 What is this hideous creature?”
 She answers them:
- 896 “This is indeed your god,
 You evil pagans, whom you trust,
 But who will destroy you in the end.
 It is indeed one of the devils
- 900 Whom you adore in your idols.”
 [. . .]
- 923 The maiden now wants to get rid of the devil,
 Having no wish to keep him any longer.
 She brings him to a mire
- 926 That was outside the city.
 It was vast and foul,
 As dead animals were discarded there.
 She tells the pagans: “Look now!
- 930 I will now throw this god of yours
 Into this mire.

- Not one of you will trust him any more.”
 Standing back, she reaches for him
 934 And throws him into the air.
 As everyone can see,
 He hits the vilest spot of the mire,
 With such force
 938 That the earth shakes, with a noise never heard before.
 Covered with filth, he departs at once
 And disappears.
 All the pagans cry out:
 942 “The Christians hold the truth indeed!
 We believe in the Lord
 Who thus honors his people.”
 “Juliana,” says the tyrant,
 946 “You are turning my men into Christians.
 If I let you prevail,
 I will lose all power over my land.
 Therefore, I will put you to a painful death,
 950 As never yet endured by a woman.”

(He orders that she be quartered, but Juliana is divinely protected from pain. She is then plunged, naked, into a basin of melted lead. The boiling liquid overflows and burns one hundred and forty pagans, a miracle that prompts four thousand witnesses to convert. Eleusius orders that the converted be put to death.)

- 1152 When Eleusius sees his soldiers
 Lying dead in the streets
 —As a result of his command—
 He becomes almost insane.
 1156 He mourns the companions,
 Whose death and demise he has caused.
 But above all, he is enraged at the maiden
 Whom he sees coming out of the fire more beautiful than ever.
 1160 “Alas!” he says, “what will become of me
 If I am unable to destroy her?”
 Meanwhile, the devil appears,
 The same devil that Juliana had chained up.
 1164 He comes close to the pagan,
 And whispers to him:
 “Whatever you do is worth nothing,
 In my honest opinion.
 1168 Beheading her
 Is the only way to insure her death.
 Either you will cut her head off,
 Or you will never get rid of her.”
 1172 When the maiden hears the devil’s words

- By an act of the Holy Spirit—
 She looks at him,
 And then makes the sign of the cross with her right hand.
 1176 When the devil sees the maiden
 Making the sign of the cross,
 He is so frightened that he does not know what to do,
 And starts turning away.
 1180 “Alas!” he says, “I was wrong to come.
 I am going to be beaten again.”
 He starts running,
 But the maiden catches up with him.
 1184 She grabs him boldly,
 And strikes him more than a hundred times.
 When she is tired of beating him,
 She lets him run away.
 1188 And he does not hesitate,
 But flees at once,
 So afraid is this evil beast
 Lest she seize him again.
 1192 Seeing this, seven hundred pagans
 Convert.
 The virgin loves God dearly,
 And God will receive her soul,
 1196 As is His wish.
 The evil tyrant tells his men:
 “Will I endure this any longer?
 Take her away!
 1200 Drag her outside the city,
 And cut her head off
 With this sharp sword of mine!
 He who beheads her
 1204 Will be assured of my friendship.”

(The pagan witnesses lament her fate, but Juliana exhorts them to convert.)

- 1231 Having thus advised them,
 The maiden turns eastward:
 “God,” she says, “in Your holy name,
 1234 Grant me, Lord, this request,
 That the tyrant be now able to kill me
 And that I suffer my martyrdom in Your name,
 For my only wish and desire
 1238 Is to die for You.
 And may those who will hear of me,
 Who will listen to the story of my martyrdom
 Readily,

- 1242 And who will remember it in their heart,
 Be protected, so that the Devil never dare
 Enter their body.
 And may they avoid committing any mortal sins.”
 [. . .]
- 1271 I must now tell you
 That it was on February the sixteenth
 That the virgin was beheaded.
- 1274 We commemorate her on this day.
 And it is said, for certain,
 That Eleusius drowned at sea,
 He who had ordered the death
- 1278 Of Juliana, God’s servant.
 In the mountains of Asturias,
 Near Saint James, in Spain,
 The body of the maiden is now kept,
- 1282 In a most beautiful reliquary.
 Thirty nuns live in the convent,
 And serve her, as it is God’s wish.
 And her soul is in God’s glory.
- 1286 Let us not forget her,
 And let us pray to her
 That she pray to our Lord
 To grant us forgiveness
- 1290 For the sins we have committed.
 May the souls of our friends
 Rest peacefully in Paradise.
 And may we too know this bliss,
- 1294 Be protected from Hell,
 And perform good deeds
 So as to live in Paradise.
 Let us all say Amen,
- 1298 And may God hear our prayers!

The Life of Saint Margaret of Antioch

Margaret counts among the most popular women martyrs venerated during the Middle Ages. Analyzing the Greek and Latin versions of the legend, Tammi,⁹⁹ the editor of *Margaret E*, shows that the most ancient Latin text—the ninth-century “*Passio a Theotimo*”—derives from a lost eighth-century Greek version in which Margaret is known as “Marina” (29–52). The two names of Margaret and Marina reappear in other legends, where these heroines are not martyrs but hermits who are led to hide their identity under a male disguise.¹⁰⁰ Hence the eventual confusion between Margaret of Antioch (a martyr), Margaret the tranvestite, and the two Marinas.¹⁰¹

Two Latin texts are the bases for the eight French poems composed in honor of Margaret of Antioch during the thirteenth century. The older one, called *Mombritius* from the name of its earliest editor,¹⁰² dates from the tenth century and is preserved in several manuscripts.¹⁰³

Saint Margaret of Antioch was particularly popular in England.¹⁰⁴ The name of the saint appeared in English litanies as early as the seventh century.¹⁰⁵ As noted by Francis in her 1927 article, four of the manuscripts that contain the *Mombritius* version are found in volumes also containing the Lives of English saints, while most of the vernacular versions of the Margaret legend are preserved in Anglo-Norman manuscripts.

Pointing out the particularities of *Caligula* in comparison with *Mombritius*, which is the most imaginative and the most ancient of the two Latin texts, Francis concludes that “caution in treatment of the supernatural grew as the centuries passed by.”¹⁰⁶ True perhaps of the Latin hagiographic tradition, this remark does not apply to the vernacular renditions of the legend. The majority of the French poets borrowed details from *Mombritius* that intensify the dramatic appeal of the story. One of them is the episode relating how Margaret is swallowed by a dragon. According to Réau,¹⁰⁷ this interpretation derives from a misleading representation of the scene in early iconography, where Margaret stands beside the monster, armed with a cross. The hagiographers assumed that, having used the cross as a weapon, she has just emerged from the dragon. This scene is by far the

favorite subject in the surviving iconographic representations.¹⁰⁸ In his *Golden Legend* (p. 353), Jacobus de Voragine expresses his doubts as to the authenticity of this episode. Yet, in Réau's words, "popular devotion always prefers the marvelous, and it is this interpretation that has prevailed" (p. 878).

In addition to the above mentioned twelfth- and thirteenth-century French poems, the legend of Margaret has inspired many versions in vernacular languages such as Middle English,¹⁰⁹ German,¹¹⁰ versified Provençal,¹¹¹ as well as a number of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century French texts in verse¹¹² and in prose.¹¹³

Version G

"Après la sainte Passion
Jesuchrist, à l'Ascencion"

This anonymous poem (which shares with *Margaret E* a similar first line) is of particularly important documentary value regarding the interaction between vernacular hagiography and the popular diffusion of the cult of the saints. Indeed, *Margaret G* was to supplant all other French renditions of the legend by the end of the thirteenth century.¹¹⁴ Numerous Books of Hours composed during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries contain this version of her story, which also inspired many fifteenth- and sixteenth-century editors.¹¹⁵ The popularity of *Margaret G* is also attested by the fact that the poem is preserved in more than a hundred manuscripts, most of them dating from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. According to Herkenrode¹¹⁶ and Carolus-Barré,¹¹⁷ one of these manuscripts was even used as an amulet.

The poem, which shows Norman and Picard linguistic traits, numbers 661 decasyllabic lines in rhyming couplets and has been edited several times. The following translation refers to the Joly edition, which is based on a fifteenth-century manuscript.¹¹⁸ Francis identifies *Mombritius* as the Latin source of this version and notes that the French adaptation softens the original recounting by deleting many of the torture episodes.¹¹⁹

The etymological significance of the saint's name (*Margarita*, "pearl") inspired artists to use the motif of the gem as a symbol of her virginity

(because of the whiteness of the pearl) and humility (because of its smallness). Since pearls were supposed to stop hemorrhages, so frequent during childbirth, the saint was often invoked in the case of difficult pregnancies.¹²⁰ Most vernacular renditions mention how Margaret will protect any pregnant woman who reads or hears the account of her life. According to the author of *Margaret G*, the procedure to be followed involves placing a book that contains the story of the saint on the petitioner's body (l. 539). Such a practice suggests that members of the poem's intended audience were illiterate. Invocation of the saint's protective power here entails concrete rather than spiritual activities on the part of the petitioner; hence the fact that one of the manuscripts that preserves this particular poem is shaped as an amulet.

- After the holy Passion
 Of Jesus Christ, when—on Ascension day—
 He ascended into Heaven,
 4 The world was filled with many good people,
 Who led a devout life.
 Through the preaching
 Of the apostles and the martyrs,
 8 The Holy Spirit worked so well
 That many people were believers,
 Among the old and the young, including children,
 Matrons, and maidens.
 12 The good news spread in such a way
 That a young maiden
 By the name of Margaret
 Heard of Jesus Christ,
 16 Of the tortures He suffered,
 Of eternal life
 (Which she knew to be neither a lie nor a fable),
 And of the eternal Kingdom of God.
 20 She abandoned the Saracen [= pagan] law,
 Was baptized and purified,
 And started loving God
 With all her heart.
 24 But she hid her faith
 From her father and friends.
 She devoted herself to God so totally
 That neither honors nor riches
 28 Could ever convince her to seek another Friend
 [“Ami,” or male suitor].
 Never
 Will she look for the company of man

- Or seek marriage,
 32 And she will turn down any such request.
 Theodosius, her father, was
 A Saracen, and so was
 Her mother.
- 36 Her father hated her deeply.
 But her mother loved her
 On account of her beauty,
 Fair body, fair face,
- 40 Knowledge, courtesy, and wisdom.
 Her parents did not live long
 But died within two years.
 She found herself an orphan.
- 44 She lived with a wet nurse
 Who had raised her since childhood.
 It was she who had initiated Margaret
 Into the teachings of Christianity.
- 48 The wet nurse knew Margaret's devotion,
 Her mode of life, and her thoughts.
 Margaret, who was without pride or sin,
 Called her her lady and master.
- 52 Everyday, Margaret would tend the sheep of her wet nurse
 And lead them to the fields,
 As she had no concern for the vain world.
 Her clothing was poor,
- 56 But her body was beautiful and comely,
 Her eyes bright, and her face shining.
 Filled
 With God's grace,
- 60 She cared for no other love
 Than the love of God.
 This was the only payment that she cared to receive,
 While God was her only investment.
- 64 It happened one day,
 As she was tending her wet nurse's sheep,
 That Olymbrius [= Olybrius] passed by,
 He who was the lord of the land.
- 68 He stared at her,
 Not looking at her clothes,
 But at her fair and graceful body,
 Which was beautiful and enticing.
- 72 He continued on his way,
 But did not forget her.
 Shortly afterwards, he sent a messenger to her,
 For he wanted to know her name
- 76 And whether she would accept to love him.

- The messenger arrived
 And approached the maiden.
 "Maiden," he said, "may God be with you!"
 80 She answered him without anger,
 Or anguish,
 Simply saying: "May God bless you too!"
 Then he delivered this message:
 84 "Maiden," he said, "my lord,
 Who happened to pass by some time ago,
 Sends me to you, for he would like you
 To give me your name,
 88 And to tell me whether you would accept to love him.
 He wishes to know who you are, what is your lineage,
 Who are your parents,
 And by what law and faith you abide ."
 92 "Lord," she says, "in my childhood,
 I was baptized as a Christian.
 I have given my love to God,
 In such a way that no offer
 96 Could ever prompt me to have another Friend."
 "Fair lady," he says, "know
 That you could find yourself the recipient of many riches.
 Be the friend of my lord,
 100 And you will live in great honors.
 Great honor and great power
 Will be yours through him.
 Do as my lord begs you to do.
 104 Reconsider your decision,
 And come along with me
 On this horse."
 "Friend, give up your arguments.
 108 You will never convince me.
 I am the servant of Jesus Christ."
 Discomfited by her response, the messenger
 Leaves at once without farewell.
 112 He goes back on his horse and departs.
 He then describes to his lord
 The merit and virtue
 He has found in the maiden:
 116 "She did not care a whit,
 For what I told and promised her.
 For she has put in a better place
 Her heart, which she will not give to you.
 120 You will never be her lord or spouse,
 Not one single day for the rest of her life.
 She has no desire for your love."

- Olymbrius becomes angry,
 124 His rage changes his appearance.
 His nostrils flare, he gnashes his teeth,
 And his face loses color.
 He greatly resents
 128 The fact that the girl has rejected him.
 He is determined to make her pay for it.
 The following day, he calls for her,
 Asking that she be brought before him,
 132 So that he can take his revenge.

(Margaret proclaims herself a Christian, telling Olymbrius that she is the servant and friend of her Spouse Jesus Christ. She is at once disrobed, hung, and whipped.)

- 180 Blood springs like a fountain,
 Running down her body.
 Neither Olymbrius, nor his soldiers,
 Nor any of the onlookers
 184 Could stand to look at her,
 Because of the running blood
 And the sufferings she endures.
 Olymbrius, the evil traitor,
 188 Cries out to her: "Sister Margaret,
 Trust me and follow my orders!
 You will then be able to regain health.
 Trust me, you will do wisely,
 192 For I will take you in marriage."
 And all those who stand around her
 Cry to her: "Sister, listen to our lord!
 Trust him, you will do wisely,
 196 For our lord is offering you
 A very rich marriage indeed.
 Do not waste your beautiful youth,
 Out of childishness or madness.
 200 Save your body, save your life!"
 The maiden hears and listens
 To the noise and the shouts of the people.
 And she reacts
 204 To what they tell her:
 "Ha," she says, "how evil are your counsels!
 You see me suffering,
 And you think that God has forsaken me?
 208 But no. He is still protecting me.
 Your thoughts are mad indeed,
 You who advise me
 To abandon for your lord

- 212 The Friendship of my Creator.
 If my body endures these tortures,
 My soul will ascend even more happily
 To Paradise, in the company of the saints.
 216 This martyrdom is but a bath
 Which purifies my body and soul.
 Through it, my soul is protected
 From the ordeal of eternal death.
 220 It will indeed allow me to avoid sin.
 Go away, men and women!
 Your words and your arguments
 Are worth no more than an apple,
 224 For Jesus Christ is with me.”

(Olymbrius now orders that she be thrown into a dark cell.)

- 245 She is brought to the entrance of the jail,
 All bloody and naked.
 But before entering,
 248 She crosses herself.
 As they push her inside,
 She changes color and becomes pale,
 Because of the darkness of the cell.
 252 He would have a harsh and mean heart,
 He who could throw her in there
 And refrain from weeping.
 As soon as she is inside,
 256 She bows at once,
 And kneels on the ground.
 With sweet words, she calls on God
 To rescue her.
 260 She sighs and weeps,
 Saying: “Help me, sweet and fair God!
 This place is so dreadful
 That I do not know where I am.
 264 And I trust no one,
 Sweet God, except You.
 I have been greatly shamed, degraded,
 And tortured.
 268 May you give me promptly Your counsel.
 And may you grant me, through Your grace,
 To see face to face
 The one that causes my torments.
 272 I must protect myself from him.
 Indeed, I do not know
 How I could have wronged him.”

- Having finished her prayers,
 276 She looks in the direction
 Of one of the corners of her fearsome cell.
 Presently, she sees a huge dragon appearing.
 He is dark and extremely hideous,
 280 With black hair,
 A huge head,
 And long and wide ears.
 His eyes are big and large,
 284 Glowing like fire.
 Flames come out of his nostrils,
 And with them, an evil smell.
 His round and irregular teeth are ugly.
 288 The inside of his mouth is darker than iron.
 His beard and hair
 Look like pure gold.
 His breath is so foul
 292 That the whole cell reeks.
 Seeing him approaching her,
 Margaret does not know what to do.
 She does not dare make a move.
 296 There is no escape from the dragon.
 Fear makes her tremble.
 With his tongue,
 The dragon lifts her up by the feet.
 300 She falls down on the ground,
 And he swallows her up in one gulp.
 But the sign of the cross that she had made
 Has imprinted her, in such a way
 304 That the serpent is pierced in the middle.
 When the maiden sees the opening,
 She emerges from the dragon,
 Healthy and unharmed,
 308 And more confident in God's love
 Than ever before.
 Soon after, a dark man,
 Who did not look like a Christian
 312 But was blacker than an Egyptian,
 Appears and approaches her.
 She whose trust is in God
 Asks him boldly:
 316 "And who are you? I order you,
 In God's name, to answer me."
 "And so I will, if you intercede for me
 Before your God, who harmed me greatly
 320 When He caused my brother to be split open,

- In the name of your love and prayers.
 You have indeed made him pay dearly
 For the sufferings you have endured.
- 324 The pain has become his.”
 “Who is your brother?” “Ruffin.
 Most painful was his death,
 Which I now deeply grieve.
- 328 This is what prompted me to come here,
 To torment you, to harm you,
 And to avenge my brother’s death.”
 “What is your name?”
- 332 “They call me Beelzebub,
 And rightly so.
 I am the king and lord of all the devils.
 I never cared for goodness,
- 336 Loving only the worst of sins.
 I have swallowed in my belly
 The riches, the goods,
 And the possessions of many people.
- 340 I have friends and soldiers
 That I send in order to deceive
 Those who, I can see,
 Act out of lust
- 344 And have no care for virtue.
 I watch over them so closely
 That I promptly induce them to sin.
 And when I hold them in my nets,
- 348 Great are my joy and my satisfaction.
 Such is indeed my reaction, when I can catch one of my preys.
 It was I who inspired the wrongs you endured,
 I who caused your capture, and your tortures.
- 352 And you can expect far more,
 Unless you agree to obey
 The one who holds you in his power.”
 When the maiden hears his words
- 356 And discovers that he is the one who caused her ordeal,
 She rushes at him,
 Pulls him down by the hair,
 And holds him tight.
- 360 She puts her foot on his chest,
 And beats him a great deal.
 Under the strain of her pressure,
 He cries out, begging for mercy:
- 364 “Ha! lady, lift up your foot
 And let me regain my breath!
 For I can hardly breathe.”

- “Ha!” she says, “mad and evil man,
 368 Despicable and foul creature,
 Beast full of iniquity,
 Threat to my virginity,
 Be careful not to harm me,
 372 If you ever want to get up!”
 “I promise you, in all honesty,
 That I will never do to you
 Any cruel, mean,
 376 Harmful, or foul deed,
 If you let me escape.
 Take your foot away, for it hurts me.”
 She lets him go, and he disappears.

(Margaret resumes her prayers, thanking God for having protected her. There is a sudden earthquake. Then a dove appears, carrying a rich crown.)

- 461 All the witnesses who were near the cell
 And who saw God’s glorious deeds,
 Began to wonder.
 464 There numbered more than four thousand,
 Men, women, and children.
 They all converted and praised God.
 And Margaret asked God to bless them.
 468 When Olymbrius heard
 About the conversion of these people,
 He became enraged.
 So great was his cruelty,
 472 That he ordered that they be taken
 Outside the walls of the city,
 And that they be beheaded
 In a field called Lymet.
 476 He could not wait one more day.
 When this evil deed was accomplished,
 He then ordered that Margaret be taken
 Out of her cell at once.
 480 “Go,” he tells his soldier,
 “And cut her head off!
 There is no better way for me to take my revenge.
 Her resistance will thus come to an end.”
 484 The soldier who holds the sword
 Goes where his lord has sent him.
 He conveys his lord’s edict word for word,
 Asking her to kneel
 488 And to offer him her neck,
 So that he can cut her head off more easily.

- For he does not want to miss his target.
 She kneels at once,
 492 Lowers her head, and offers him her neck.
 But as he is lifting the sword,
 He looks to his right,
 And sees that God, accompanied
 496 By His angels, is standing at Margaret's side.
 The soldier becomes frightened.
 As if bewitched,
 He can no longer move his feet,
 500 Nor lift his arm.
 He is dismayed and confused.
 "Maiden," he says, "get up at once!
 I will never strike you,
 504 Rest assured."
 She tells him: "Friend, why?
 For you will never join me,
 If you do not kill me now."
 508 "I will not do it, for Jesus Christ
 Is beside me, who forbids me
 To do such a thing."
 "Friend, if you have seen God,
 512 Do what you must do, thus allowing me
 To join my Creator and to adore Him in Heaven.
 For I have no care to remain in this world any longer."
 And the soldier agrees.
 516 She starts praying devoutly:
 [. . .]
 528 "I ask for Your mercy, Good Lord, and present you with this
 request:
 May all those who will write
 My life, or have it written,
 Receive Your forgiveness, whatever their sins,
 532 Sins which are never hidden to You.
 I, Margaret, also pray to You,
 God, that You give me power
 To protect any pregnant woman,
 536 If she crosses herself
 With a book containing the story of my life,
 Or opens it,
 Or places it on her body,
 540 So that she be granted a safe delivery.
 And may You also grant me the following:
 May any woman who commemorates me,
 In a church founded in my name,
 544 Be granted—when she finishes

- Her prayers,
 And after listening to the story of my martyrdom—
 That the fruit of her womb not die,
 548 At the time of conception,
 Or during pregnancy.
 And when her time comes,
 May her infant be in good health,
 552 And free from any physical or mental deformity.
 I ask You also to grant me this request:
 May he be never wrongly judged nor deprived of his rights
 —In a court of justice or in a suit—
 556 He who will have, on that day,
 Remembered my life.
 And may he who gives
 —To any church where there are proofs
 560 That my life is true—
 Candles of oil or wax,
 Be protected from all perils.
 I also ask You, good God,
 564 That You protect the places
 —Where my life will be written—
 From the power of evil spirits,
 And from fires caused either by lightning or by storm.
 568 May the evil spirit never visit these places,
 And may they be inhabited by the Holy Spirit,
 In goodness, peace, and charity.
 And may joy, honor, and good luck
 572 Be bestowed on any man or woman
 Who lives at a place
 Where my life is written.”

(Descending from Heaven, a dove tells Margaret that her requests will be granted. Margaret is then beheaded, and the angels carry her soul to Paradise.)

- 632 Theotimus, the man who saw to it
 That Margaret's martyrdom be recorded,
 Along with the prayers she said while in prison,
 Had these writings sent to every church.
 636 Thanks to him, it became known to everyone
 That Margaret had departed from this earth.
 This news inspired
 Many ill people to go to the place where she was martyred,
 640 In order to be cured of their afflictions.
 There was no one,
 Upon touching her tomb,
 Who did not find himself healed at once.

- 644 Whether bitten by a snake or suffering from fever,
 They were all cured forever.
 And I can tell you more:
 There, songs of angels were often heard,
 648 As well as the moaning
 Of unbelievers, who came to Margaret's tomb,
 Lamenting
 The miracles made by God,
 652 On account of His friend who lay there.
 Margaret died at this place.
 May God, who sees everything,
 Grant His glory
 656 To those who remember her.
 She is now in a good place
 Where she knows only bliss.
 Let us pray to God that everyone
 660 Be granted to go directly to Paradise.
 Let us say amen, that God may grant our request.

Version A

“A la Deu loenge e a la sue gloire”

This rendition of the legend of Margaret, which comprises eighty-five stanzas numbering four rhyming decasyllabic lines, is contained in a single manuscript.¹²¹ Written in Anglo-Norman, this *Life*¹²² combines elements found in *Mombritius* and in *Caligula*. In the final lines of his poem (ll. 339–40), the author mentions that he composed it in honor of a church dedicated to Saint Margaret, perhaps the parish church of Westminster Abbey.

Summary

To praise and glorify God, let us commemorate the story of a maiden to whom He gave virtue and victory. In His honor, she received baptism and became a Christian. (ll. 1–8)

Living in Antioch, at a time when Christians were persecuted, Margaret was born of noble pagans. Her father was a bishop in the pagan religion, while she believed in the eternal King. At fifteen, she was a beautiful maiden who spent her days tending her wet nurse's sheep. There an evil man saw her and took her to his lord. This tyrant, whose name was Olybrius, proceeds to ask Margaret about her

faith. She praises Christ's royal power: through Him, mankind was saved from Hell and eternal death. Because of her response, the tyrant has her thrown into prison. The following morning, Olybrius offers to become her husband, or she is to suffer great tortures. Describing the power of her divine Spouse, Margaret reaffirms her unconditional faith. On the tyrant's order, she is disrobed and whipped so harshly that blood soon covers her white flesh. Her sufferings are such that Olybrius covers his eyes, while the many onlookers implore the maiden to change her mind. Margaret reproves their reaction: tortures and death will be rewarded in Heaven. Realizing that the beating will not break her, Olybrius has her thrown into a dark jail. (ll. 9–152)

A dragon appears suddenly. He swallows the maiden, but God accomplishes a miracle: by making the sign of the cross, Margaret splits the dragon in two and emerges unharmed. A black devil, in human form, now appears and threatens the maiden. He will avenge the dragon—his brother, whose name is Ruffin—by taking her to Hell. Margaret shows no fear. She grasps the devil by his hair, throws him to the ground, and starts questioning him. He acknowledges her victory, begs her to let him free, but is forced to recall the biblical events that caused the bad angels to fall and to become devils. After Margaret prays to God, the earth opens up and engulfs the devil. (ll. 153–236)

The following morning, Olybrius orders that embers be attached to Margaret's sides. She is then plunged head first into a tank of cold water. Miraculously, her bonds are untied, the tank breaks open, and a white dove descends from Heaven, carrying a golden crown as a sign of the glory that awaits the maiden. Five thousand convert and are subsequently beheaded on Olybrius' orders. Margaret is now taken outside the city to endure the same fate. She prays to God to grant her the following: may whoever commemorates her passion be protected from evil and forgiven; may pregnant mothers give birth to healthy infants; may the ill—such as the mute and the deaf—be healed if they implore her help. Having thus prayed, Margaret tells the executioner to strike the fatal blow. He refuses at first, knowing that God is with her. Margaret insists and declares that she will not intercede for him if he does not do his duty. The angels take her holy soul to Heaven, where she is now a crowned queen. May those who contribute generously to the welfare of this church, where people come to serve Saint Margaret and God, be granted salvation. (ll. 237–340)

Version B

“La vie d'une virge vus voil issi conter”

This anonymous version of the legend contains sixty-eight stanzas, most of them numbering six rhyming alexandrine lines. Edited by Spencer,¹²³ the poem is preserved in a single manuscript.¹²⁴ This manuscript, which is

analyzed by Spencer,¹²⁵ seems to have been frequently used: one folio (fol. 121) is partly torn away, with the result that lines 88–123 are fragmented or entirely missing.

Composed in England,¹²⁶ *Margaret B* is a close rendition of the Latin *Caligula* account.¹²⁷

Summary

I want to tell you the story of a maiden whose sanctity we should praise, for she will aid us whenever we invoke her. I used to care for temporal love and for the affairs of the world. But I want now to spend my time in a useful manner, by telling you the story of this maiden, as I was asked to do. May Christ inspire my endeavor, in the name of the maiden He loved so dearly. (ll. 1–20)

Her father, Theodosius, was a powerful bishop of the pagans. After her mother's death, Margaret went to live with her wet nurse. There the maiden, whom everyone loved because of her goodness and beauty, spent her days tending sheep. It happened one day that Olybrius, the persecutor of Christians, passed by the fields. When he saw her, he coveted her for her physical beauty. But Margaret, who had heard of the Christians' suffering, was by then determined to become a martyr for the love of Christ. [Lines 87–97, damaged, describe the first encounter between the two antagonists.] When Olybrius realizes that the maiden will not change her mind, he has her thrown into a dark jail. [Lines 109–117 are damaged.] He now orders that she be whipped. Margaret's tender flesh is torn up, but the maiden shows no distress. She is again sent to prison. (ll. 21–176)

A dragon appears suddenly, and Margaret feels great fear, as can be expected. As the dragon is about to swallow her, she crosses herself, a sign which causes the death of the dragon. Soon after, a devil appears. Margaret, who this time is not frightened, attacks and subdues the devil. Wondering about her power, she who was born of pagan parents, the devil proceeds to narrate how Satan, whose fall inspired him to take his revenge on Christians, has never been able to tempt chaste maidens. The earth then swallows this demonic man for ever. (ll. 177–241)

Olybrius summons Margaret and offers to marry her. She rejects his offer and is subjected to a series of tortures. Embers are attached to her sides, but she feels no pain. She is then thrown head first into a large tank filled with water, but emerges unharmed. A white dove now brings her a golden crown. Five thousand onlookers convert. On Olybrius' order, they are taken to Armenia, where they are beheaded in a field called Limech. The tyrant now orders Malcus, a young soldier, to behead Margaret. The saint asks Christ to grant her the following: all those who will commemorate, compose, or read her Passion will be protected; churches built in her honor will be visited by the Holy Spirit; expectant mothers will not suffer and will give birth to healthy children. As Margaret finishes her prayer, the whole universe is shaken, a clap of thunder is heard, and a shining dove appears from Heaven. A voice announces that Margaret's request will be honored and that she is now to become Christ's spouse. Margaret enjoins Malcus to strike the blow if he wants to be saved. The soul of the beheaded saint is carried away by angels. (ll. 242–419)

A witness to these events known by the name of Theophilus [= Theotimus] took her body to Antioch and buried the saint in the church of Saint Clete. My source says that Theophilus then wrote Margaret's story, recounting how she suffered and how she died on August 13. May Margaret intercede for us before God. (ll. 420–437)

Version C

“Quant tel espuns aucit oiz”

Only eighty lines of this poem are preserved. In 1889, when Zingerle¹²⁸ edited this fragment, the manuscript, a single folio, belonged to Emil Knoll. According to the editor, the folio dates from the end of the thirteenth century, or from the beginning of the fourteenth century.

Inspired by the Latin *Caligula*, this rendition of the legend is written in octosyllabic rhyming couplets.

Summary

Having heard Margaret's answer, Olybrius reacts in a bestial manner. Gritting his teeth, foaming with anger, he orders that she be disrobed and whipped. Enduring this ordeal with great courage, Christ's spouse asks God to protect her from the pagans. (Recto; 40 lines)

Now in prison, Margaret starts praying, but is interrupted by the sudden appearance of a dragon. The maiden is terrified; as the dragon approaches her, she calls upon Christ and crosses herself. The dragon breaks open. Looking apprehensively around her, Margaret sees an Ethiopian standing in a corner, ugly beyond words. (Verso; 40 lines)

Version D

“Puis ke Deus nostre sire de mort resuscita”

Inspired by the Latin *Mombritius*, this anonymous poem comprises seventy-one stanzas varying in length from three to nine rhyming alexandrine lines. *Margaret D* is preserved in a single manuscript.¹²⁹

There is some dispute concerning the date of *Margaret D.* According to Spencer,¹³⁰ its editor, the language of the text indicates that it was composed during the latter half of the thirteenth century. However, as Meyer points out,¹³¹ Spencer fails to differentiate between the language of the author, an Anglo-Norman, and that of the scribe.¹³² Meyer, who makes this distinction, believes the poem to be from the late twelfth century, while Francis¹³³ and Tammi¹³⁴ date it from the late twelfth century or early thirteenth century.

Summary

Since our Lord rose from the dead, many saints have died for Him. For, in the early times of Christianity, evil men were very powerful. They sent many Christians to their death, ordering that they be burned or stoned. The story that I will tell you, chosen among many holy narratives, concerns a maiden who held steadfastly to her faith. She can help you know her Lord. (ll. 1–19)

The maiden was of a noble lineage. Her father, Theodorus, was a pagan who did not fear God and hated Christians. When Margaret's mother died, she went directly to Hell. Margaret then went to live with her wet nurse, who told her about the martyrs. Margaret's faith in God grew even stronger. One day, a tyrant—Olybrius—passed by the field where she was tending sheep. She was fifteen at that time, and most beautiful. Olybrius asks her about her name and faith, and Margaret tells him that she is a Christian. At these words, Olybrius sends her to prison. The following day, she is disrobed, hanged, and beaten. Blood runs over her breast like water from a fountain. Anguished by the sight, Olybrius, and with him, many onlookers, urge her to recant. Margaret tells them not to weep, for compassion is not in order. She is then brought back to prison. (ll. 20–161)

She is praying and crossing herself when a dragon appears suddenly. Fear overtakes the maiden, who trembles and implores God not to let the dragon devour her. The beast grabs her and swallows her. However, he cannot resist the sign of the cross, and dies of it. Thus able to emerge unharmed, Margaret expresses her thanks and joy. A devil appears now, in the shape of a black man. He seizes the hand of the maiden, whose first reaction is one of fear, but who soon proceeds to grab him and to throw him down. As Margaret thanks Christ, her Spouse, for allowing her to overpower the devil, the Cross illuminates the cell, and a white dove lands on it. The devil now tells his story: his name is Beelzebub, and he is only following the orders of Satan, his master. Calling on her leniency, he asks Margaret to send him to a place where he will do no harm. Margaret agrees to his request. The earth opens and swallows Beelzebub. (ll. 162–265)

Olybrius sends for her. In the presence of many onlookers, he orders that she be stripped and hung above fires, and then drowned in water. A white dove appears and Margaret is miraculously untied. Five thousand convert. Olybrius becomes enraged and orders that she be beheaded. Margaret asks God to grant her the power

to protect all those who will read or commemorate her passion, those who will build her a church, and expectant mothers. At the end of her prayer, a clap of thunder is heard and there is a great storm. Everyone falls to the ground, and so does Margaret. Although reluctant at first, Malcus, her executioner, cuts off her head after she promises to intercede for him. Angels take her soul to God. (ll. 266–377)

Theophilus [= Theotimus] took her body and buried her in a tomb of marble. He wrote her story and made her Passion known to us. After striking the fatal blow, Malcus fell dead to the ground; his soul was carried directly to Heaven. All the sick who visited her tomb were cured by touching Margaret's body. This happened in August. May she intercede for us at the time of our death, and may we join her in Heaven. (ll. 378–402)

Version E

“Après la sainte passion
Et après la surrection”

This version contains 498 lines in octosyllabic rhyming couplets. Tammi,¹³⁵ its editor, gives an analysis of the eighteenth-century manuscript¹³⁶ which was for a long time assumed to be the sole surviving transcription of a “lost” original. But, as noted above,¹³⁷ this “lost” original manuscript has recently been identified.¹³⁸

The author identifies himself (“Fouque,” l. 490) in the hope that all listeners to whom his poem will be recited may remember him in their prayers. As Jones points out, this is the main reason why vernacular hagiographers give their name.¹³⁹ Neither Meyer nor Tammi can ascertain whether the “Fouque” who wrote the *Creed of the Usurer* in the thirteenth century is the same one as the author of *Margaret E*.

According to Francis,¹⁴⁰ the Latin source of *Margaret E* is the *Mombritius* account. Tammi gives a brief account of the differences between *Margaret E* and the Latin text.¹⁴¹

Summary

After Christ's Passion, as my source relates, the Christians endured many torments from those who were the declared enemies of the holy Church. Among these pagan tormentors, Olybrius was one of the most cruel. One day, he saw a beautiful young girl. She was called Margaret, had lost her mother, and had been banished by her

father on account of her Christian faith. Her wet nurse had offered her shelter, and Margaret spent her days tending the wet nurse's sheep. Seeing her beauty and incited by lust, Olybrius sent her a messenger to let her know that he wished to marry her if she was a free woman, or to take her as his concubine if she was not. (ll. 1–46)

Brought before Olybrius, Margaret proclaims herself to be Christ's spouse. Angered by her words, the tyrant has her whipped, and then thrown into prison. Two days later, he orders that she be hanged up, beaten, and tortured with iron instruments. Her sufferings are such that Olybrius covers his eyes with his cloak, while the crowd weeps. Margaret still refuses to recant. Again thrown into a dark jail, she begins to pray and crosses herself. A dragon appears suddenly. Very frightened, Margaret prays to God, but the dragon swallows her. She crosses herself once again, a sign which causes the beast to explode. Margaret escapes from the ordeal free and unharmed. But now, a huge and ugly devil grabs her by the hand. He accuses her of having killed his companion. Margaret overpowers him. A dove announces that she will be crowned in Paradise. Identifying himself as Beelzebub, the devil now describes what strategies he uses to tempt Christians and to force them to recant, lie, and steal. He says that Margaret's parents are now serving him. But she, being a Christian, is not to have the same fate. She banishes him to a place where he will never do any more harm. (ll. 47–330)

Olybrius now submits Margaret to the ordeal of fire and water. Margaret prays to God that she may display His power: the earth quakes and Heaven opens up. White angels bring her a crown, her bonds are suddenly untied, and she emerges unharmed from the water. More than five thousand people convert—women and children notwithstanding—whom Olybrius condemns to death. Margaret's last prayer is the following request: may those who will light a candle in her name, write, or hear her Passion be protected; may pregnant women give birth to healthy infants. A clap of thunder is now heard; the frightened bystanders fall to the ground. Margaret asks them to commemorate her, and then enjoins Malcus, her executioner, to do his duty. He refuses at first, but then obeys her when she tells him that by doing so he will gain access to Paradise. All the sick are cured, while angels carry her soul to Heaven. (ll. 331–480)

Theocunus [= Theotimus] witnessed her Passion and wrote her story in Latin. And I, Fouque, have just translated it. May those who hear her exemplary story be protected by Margaret and blessed by God. (ll. 481–98)

Version F

“Escotez, tote bone gent”

This version is an anonymous poem numbering 478 octosyllabic lines in rhyming couplets. It is preserved in a single manuscript which contains other Saints' Lives and religious works.¹⁴²

The poem was probably composed by an Anglo-Norman author, according to Francis¹⁴³ who names *Mombritius* as its Latin source. The following translation is based on Joly's edition.¹⁴⁴

Summary

Listen, good people, for I shall tell you about the noble Margaret. We must believe in Christ's resurrection, as part of our faith. After His Passion, the pagans started tormenting the Christians, forcing them to recant, or condemning them to death. (ll. 1–22)

The prefect of Lombardy, Olybrius, went to Antioch to persecute the Christians. He saw Margaret in the fields, tending her wet nurse's sheep. He sends messengers to fetch her: if she is a free woman, he will marry her, and if not, he will keep her and make her rich. Hearing these words, Margaret asks Christ to protect her virginity. Brought before Olybrius, she reveals her faith and is sent to prison. The following day, Olybrius has her whipped, and then tortured with iron pliers. Unable to withstand the sight of her sufferings, Olybrius begs her to change her mind. To no avail: Margaret replies that her torments will be rewarded in Heaven, while he will go to Hell. Enraged, Olybrius has her again thrown into prison. Margaret's wet nurse brings her food and writes down the prayers she is addressing to God. The wet nurse suddenly notices a dragon. Margaret is so frightened that she falls to her knees and implores the Holy Spirit to help her defeat the dragon. The latter swallows her, but she has time to cross herself and to implore Christ's name: the dragon explodes, and she escapes unharmed. (ll. 23–243)

Now a devil appears, in the shape of a black man. He grabs her white hand and accuses her of having killed his brother, Ruffon [= Ruffin] the dragon. Hearing this, the maiden seizes him by the hair, throws him to the ground, and puts her foot on his neck. He tells his story. His name is Beelzebub, and he spends his time tempting men and women, giving them nightmares, inspiring them to drink and lust. He wonders about the fact that she has overpowered him despite her bad lineage. The earth now opens up and swallows the devil. The following day, Margaret is again brought before Olybrius. He has her hands and feet bound, and she is thrown into a tank of boiling water. A dove comes down from Heaven and announces that she will be crowned by God. Seeing this miracle, women, children, and five thousand men convert and are immediately condemned to death. The maiden is now taken outside the city. Malcus, the executioner, asks her to forgive him, for he sees that she is protected by Christ and His angels. Margaret asks God to grant her the following: may those who read or hear her Passion, find themselves in danger on land or on the seas, or burn a candle in her honor, be protected; may pregnant women who hear her Passion give birth to healthy infants. A clap of thunder is heard. A dove carrying a cross descends, announcing that her request will be granted. Margaret then asks the reluctant Malcus to do his duty, if he wants to go to Paradise. Angels descend from Heaven; devils are lamenting; those who touch her body are healed. The angels carry Margaret's soul to Heaven. Let us pray to her to intercede for us, that we may be protected from Hell. (ll. 244–478)

Version H

“Qui cest escrit vodra entendre”

The eighth and last thirteenth-century French poem of the Margaret legend is an anonymous rendition of 630 lines edited by Meyer,¹⁴⁵ and more recently by Clanfield.¹⁴⁶ It is preserved in a single manuscript.¹⁴⁷

According to Meyer, the scribe, who was French (perhaps from Picardy), transcribed an Anglo-Norman poem. Whether he did this in France or in England is difficult to ascertain. However, since the Sloane manuscript was in England at a very early date, Meyer concludes that the transcribing was probably done there.

The 630 lines of *Margaret H* vary from seven to nine syllables, and from ten to thirteen from line 200 on. In addition to this extreme irregularity, the many grammatical errors of the text lead Meyer to date the poem from the end of the thirteenth century at the earliest. By that time, English had supplanted Anglo-Norman in England. The poem is loosely based on the Latin *Mombricitus*. The following translation is based on Meyer's edition.

Summary

Whoever hears this story will learn of an exemplary Christian heroine. Theodosius, a most cruel pagan provost, begot a daughter who, like a rose amidst thorns, was blessed with God's grace. Margaret turned to Christ at a very young age. Angered by the fact that his daughter was a Christian, Theodosius banished her and forced her to live with her wet nurse. But Christ took pity on her and became her Father. Margaret decided to devote herself to Him and to remain chaste. Although of noble lineage, she was not proud and accepted to tend her wet nurse's sheep. (ll. 1–54)

Olybrius, a tyrant from Asia, came to Antioch in order to persecute the Christians. Passing through the place where Margaret lived, he noticed her beauty and decided to marry her, if she was noble, or to make her his concubine. Summoned by Olybrius, Margaret tells him of her vow of chastity and love for Christ. Angered, the tyrant has her thrown into prison. The following day, she is hanged up by her feet, disrobed, and whipped. Her body is soon covered with blood, but the maiden finds in her prayers the courage to disregard these torments. Neither the crowd's anguished appeals nor Olybrius' threats succeed in making her recant. Covering his eyes, the tyrant orders that she be whipped again. She is then thrown into a dark cell. Crossing herself, Margaret starts praying to God, her divine Father.

Her wet nurse miraculously appears before her, bringing food and drink. But now a devil appears in the guise of a dragon. He approaches the maiden. Margaret does not let fear paralyze her: she lies down, arms and legs outstretched in the form of the Cross. The dragon swallows her, but bursts in half. The maiden emerges unharmed and thanks God. A devil now appears in the shape of a dark man and seizes her by the hand. He wants to avenge the death of his brother, Ruffin the dragon. Grabbing him by the hair, the maiden throws him onto the ground and holds him down under her foot. A divine light suddenly illuminates the room. The cross of Christ appears, while a dove tells Margaret that God awaits her in Heaven. Beelzebub now narrates how his greatest joy is to tempt the devout and confuse the wise. The maiden crosses herself and the earth engulfs Beelzebub. (ll. 55–436)

Olybrius summons her and orders her to recant. Since she refuses, she is disrobed, hanged high up for everyone to see, and burned with embers. Her hands and feet are then bound, and she is thrown into a tank of water. The earth trembles, while a dove descends with the crown of chastity. Miraculously freed, Margaret emerges unharmed from the water. Five thousand people convert and are beheaded in a field called Clime in “Hermany.” Margaret is taken outside the city and Marcus, the executioner, lets her say a final prayer. Margaret’s requests are the following: may he who has a church built in her name, commemorate or read her Life, or prays before her relics be assured of God’s forgiveness; may pregnant women who invoke her name give birth to healthy children. The earth then shakes, and a clap of thunder is heard. A dove announces that her requests will be granted. Marcus consents to do his duty after she promises to intercede for him. When she is beheaded, the sick are cured, the blind can see, and the lepers are healed. Angels take her soul to God. (ll. 437–619)

A learned cleric called Theophilus [= Theotimus] witnessed her Passion and wrote it down. Let us pray to God that, in Margaret’s name, we may be inspired to hate evil and love good. May God’s compassion be with us. (ll. 620–30)

The Life of Saint Marina

“Moult est folz qui son umbre chace”

This anonymous poem, which comprises 1,176 lines written in octosyllabic rhyming couplets, is preserved in two fifteenth-century manuscripts.¹⁴⁸ The following translation refers to Clugnet’s edition of the text.¹⁴⁹ To date, there is no revised edition of this Life, which has not attracted the attention of the critics.

The legend concerns an early fifth-century Maronite saint who lived as a recluse at Kanoubine in Syria. According to Nau,¹⁵⁰ the word “kanoubine” refers to caverns carved in the rock and used as cells by hermits. A young orphan from Tripoli, Marina disguised herself as a man and took refuge in one of these cells. Accused of having seduced a young girl of the region, Marina was forced to raise the child. Her real identity was only discovered after her death.

First written in Syriac, the legend of Marina was then translated into Greek, Coptic, and Latin. Marina the hermit came to be confused with Margaret of Antioch, who was also known as Marina.¹⁵¹ Since the Latin name of Marina evokes the sea, she was also confused with Pelagia (a Greek word referring to the sea), a repentant harlot.

Marina’s feast was celebrated on February 12 in the Greek Church and February 8 in the Latin Church.¹⁵² The Latin source of *Marina* is found in the *Vitae Patrum*,¹⁵³ among stories devoted to holy hermits of Egypt. Hence the identification of Marina as being from Egypt, in both the Latin source and its French rendition (l. 55). Rosenthal shows how the story unfolds more logically in the French poem than in its Latin source.¹⁵⁴ The latter never explains why Marina hides her sexual identity; in the French narrative, however, Marina’s silence is the result of her father’s instruction never to reveal it.

(The poet begins his narrative with a warning against vanity and concupiscence. He then praises the virtue of patience in insuring salvation.)

- 47 No suffering, no ordeal,
Can be conquered without patience.

- For patience is such a strong shield
 50 That distress, anguish, and death
 Cannot be vanquished or rejected
 By anyone who does not protect himself with it.
 Indeed, the lady whose story I am about to recount
 54 Knew much about the virtue of patience.
 She was born in Egypt,
 And was like a flower whose fragrance still charms us,
 Inspiring us to endure,
 58 In God's name, the many ordeals
 Of this life, and its sufferings.
 We will be crowned with her
 In eternal glory.
 62 I do not know about her parents,
 But I know that her father was loved by God,
 As became manifest.
 He was old, and had only one child,
 66 A fair daughter,
 Still young as this story begins.
 This good man, who knew about
 The world and its temptations,
 70 Felt the desire to renounce it.
 He left his land, his country,
 And all his acquaintances.
 Neither his friends nor his child could keep him from doing so,
 74 Or convince him to act
 Contrary to his wishes.
 This was inspired in him by the Holy Spirit,
 Who tells us to abandon everything,
 78 Wealth, possessions,
 Brothers, sisters, father and mother,
 And to dominate and chastise the flesh
 So as to obey His command.
 82 What I tell you is the truth:
 Wishing to act
 Upon his desire,
 He came to a man whom he trusted,
 86 And left the young girl with him
 —His daughter, whose name was Marina.
 He left the child with this relative
 And then departed from his land.
 90 At a distance of thirty leagues,
 He stopped at an abbey
 Because of its holy renown.
 He opened his heart to the abbot.
 94 With many tears, devoutly,
 He confessed to him

- And told of his desire to leave the world
 Before Satan could deceive him
 98 Through his many evil tricks.
 Throwing himself at the abbot's feet
 He humbly requested
 To be accepted in his convent.
 102 He did not want God, whom everyone wants to honor,
 To decide the hour of his death
 Before he could complete his repentance
 And do penance for his sins.
 106 The abbot, a very devout man,
 Praised him with great joy,
 And said to him:
 "My son, I heard your request.
 110 You want to subdue your body
 And to escape from the dangers
 Of the world that deceives people.
 May Jesus Christ be praised,
 114 Who gave you this desire!
 Your wishes will be granted:
 I welcome you as a companion."
 The good and wise man
 118 Bowed before the abbot.
 He henceforth lived in the abbey,
 In such a holy way
 That everyone loved him.
 122 He was obedient to all,
 To the abbot's great pleasure,
 And remained at the abbey,
 Leading a most worthy existence.
 126 One day, he began to think
 And to remember the daughter
 Whom he had left behind.
 He became very sad,
 130 Wondering what to do for her
 And how to help her.
 He was afraid that the treachery of the world,
 Which grew greater and greater every day,
 134 Would ensnare her in its nets,
 On account of her beauty.
 His sadness became such
 That the abbot perceived it.
 138 Seeking to know the reason for his sadness,
 The abbot talked to the man he dearly loved:
 "Brother, hear me!
 I want you to trust me.

- 142 You are sad, I do not know why.
 Open yourself to me
 So that I can comfort you.
 Do not fear me,
 146 For I only want to help you.
 If you are in any trouble,
 Talk to me without fear.”
 The good man answered humbly:
 150 “My father, I will speak to you
 Without hiding anything.
 A while ago, I began to think
 And to remember the past.
 154 It made me sad, that is the truth,
 To the point that I cannot stop thinking about it.
 I have a young child, back home,
 And otherwise, not much family.
 158 This child is so young
 That my heart feels pity,
 Since the child has neither a mother,
 Nor a sister or brother.
 162 I fear that the world and its treachery
 Might trap my child into sin.
 I spend night and day weeping over that,
 As you can see.”
 166 Deeply moved, the abbot
 Attempted to comfort the good man,
 He who was doing so well in his abbey
 That everyone loved him.
 170 “Brother,” he said, “be reassured.
 There is no need to grieve.
 Tomorrow you will leave.
 You will return to your land
 174 And bring your child here.
 We will welcome the child
 Into our congregation,
 Out of compassion for you.”
 178 The good man felt great joy.
 Not knowing how to thank the abbot,
 He threw himself at his feet.
 And the abbot helped him up.
 182 The following morning he left,
 Went back to his land,
 And arrived at the house of his relative,
 Where he had left the young girl.
 186 Given her age, she had been very affected
 By her father’s departure,

- And much anguished.
Great was her joy
190 When she saw him again.
She began to weep,
But her father did not respond,
Proceeding to dress her
194 In the guise of a young boy.
His only desire was to return to the abbey
And to hasten their departure.
As fast as he could, he left the place
198 And traveled so speedily
That he was soon back at the abbey,
And joyfully welcomed by the brothers.
Happy to receive the child,
202 The abbot asked for the child's name.
The father answered with these words:
"You can give the child the name of Marin,
Without changing much the child's real name."
206 The abbot told him to take care of the child,
And he gladly agreed,
Since there was nothing he wanted more.
He took the child into his cell
210 And raised the child as his own.
The good child was taught
And, with the years, became very learned
And filled with virtues,
214 Thanks to the care of his father
Who was well aware of human nature
And of the weaknesses of the flesh.
He taught the child the divine law,
218 And how one must protect oneself
From the temptations of the Devil
That lead to damnation.
"My child," he would say, "we must avoid
222 Him who induces us to forget God,
And who attempts to damn us
Through his tricks and deceits.
For we will be among the chosen,
226 In a place where we will be honored,
If we live here a humble life.
He who lives humbly
Is indeed protected from the Devil's power.
230 Thus, keep your heart pure,
Be patient with everyone,
Obey God's will,
And God will help you.

- 234 Meditate on death,
 Remembering that our hour will come,
 And that we know neither the day nor the time.
 It is God's will
- 238 That we must one day leave this world.
 He who will deserve Him
 Will know an endless joy
 And will have a royal welcome.
- 242 Human eyes cannot picture,
 Nor can our ears apprehend,
 The bliss of Paradise
 Promised by God to all His friends."
- 246 Being truly wise,
 The child took to heart
 Everything said by the good father.
 Then the hour of his death arrived,
- 250 Which no one can escape.
 Illness forced him to stay in bed.
 He called for the child
 And, weeping, said these words:
- 254 "My child," he said, "listen to me:
 Because of my old age,
 Illness is taking me.
 Soon, I believe,
- 258 I will depart from this life.
 And you, who know how
 I kept your identity secret,
 Be careful not to reveal it
- 262 Until the time of your death.
 Remain firm and strong,
 Whatever may happen to you,
 And do not become close to anyone.
- 266 Do not let anyone see you at night,
 So that no one may know who you are.
 I will go, for God is calling me.
 As for you, remain in my cell.
- 270 Be obedient to everyone,
 Humble, wise, and patient.
 Keep away from debauchery.
 Beware that nothing may cause
- 274 You to be discovered.
 And may the Holy Spirit and His grace
 Be with you, my child.
 I can do no more; pray for me."
- 278 The maiden, who was very wise,
 Saw that her father was dying.

- It is a wonder that she did not cry.
 But she did not let herself be frightened,
 282 So intent was she not to disturb his peace.
 She even attempted to reassure him:
 "Good father," said the maiden,
 "Your life is ending.
 286 Do not fear for me.
 But keep your strength
 To pray to God
 Who was crucified for us,
 290 So that the ordeal of your death,
 Endured in the name of Him who suffered unjustly,
 Be accepted by God.
 Do not let yourself be weakened
 294 By your tenderness toward me.
 For my hope and my trust
 Are in God, who created us
 And who will lead us to a good end.
 298 I will obey your command
 With the help of God, the all-powerful,
 Who will always take care
 Of me, His humble creature.
 302 And when you reach eternal glory,
 Remember me
 And pray for me,
 That no temptation
 306 Of the Devil may ever overcome me
 Or take me away from my Creator."
 Their talk ended then,
 With the arrival of the abbot
 310 Who was coming to see the good man,
 And to comfort him
 In his final hours.
 Then everyone mourned him,
 314 Regretting the company of this man
 Who had led such a holy life.
 Marin's grief could not be contained,
 At the sight of the father's funeral.
 318 Marin goes aside.
 His heart almost breaks from grief.
 He weeps deeply, wringing his hands.
 "Alas!" he says, "how cruel is Death
 322 Which took him away from me!
 If I could shorten my life
 And leave along with him,
 I would no longer be sad and anguished.

- 326 But I must remain here, alone.
 Could there be a harsher torment
 And a more difficult test than this one?
 Who will alleviate my sadness?
 330 Who will take care of me?
 I do not know what will become of my life.
 Open up, earth, and engulf me!
 Death is too slow in coming!
 334 I see only pain and suffering
 In my present situation.
 It would be better for me to die than to live!"
 I cannot include in my writing
 338 Everything Marin said and did.
 The brothers buried the good man,
 While Brother Marin kept on mourning,
 He who was now eighteen years of age.
 342 His companions comforted him,
 Caring for him and loving him,
 Since Marin was most obedient
 And filled with grace and virtue.
 346 He would converse only with his elders,
 So great was his fear of debauchery.
 To the young monks, he was agreeable and sweet.
 Thus, everyone loved him,
 350 And he spent his time praying,
 Meditating, and contemplating.
 There was a cart in the abbey
 That was often led to the sea,
 354 Which was nearby.
 The brothers would take the cart there
 To buy the food
 Which they lived on at the abbey.
 358 One day, as two brothers were about to take the cart and go,
 The abbot called for brother Marin
 And asked him:
 "Why are you not going along with them?"
 362 And Marin answered him politely:
 "Because you did not order me to do so.
 But if you so wish, I will obey you."
 The abbot said: "Now is the time.
 366 Join the two brothers on the cart.
 Such is our desire."
 Marin bows and leaves the abbot,
 For he is eager to obey.
 370 The brothers led the cart toward the sea,
 Bringing Marin along with them.

- Marin had much fear in his heart,
 But felt compelled to obey.
 374 Between the abbey and the sea,
 There was a village
 Where travellers could lodge.
 The brothers usually stopped there
 378 Upon their return from the sea,
 At an inn whose owner
 Would readily welcome them.
 The brothers would spend the night there,
 382 Since it was the only way
 To be allowed to dine at the inn.
 The innkeeper I have just mentioned
 Had a most beautiful daughter.
 386 The Devil, who tempts everyone,
 Inspired her in such a way
 That she gave herself
 To a knight of the land
 390 Who was much in love with her.
 Having conceived, she became pregnant,
 As her father soon realized.
 Shocked and angered,
 394 He ordered her
 To tell the whole truth
 About her sin.
 And she, thus ordered,
 398 Did not dare name the knight
 From whom she had conceived,
 Not knowing whether he would concur.
 She felt fear and anguish.
 402 But the Devil who had inspired her
 Was now most eager
 To ensnare some good man.
 His pleasure is to take a soul away from God.
 406 Seeing the girl thus anguished,
 The Devil now wants to perfect his work
 And to trap her into another evil deed.
 No one can put this in words.
 410 He presses her in such a way
 That she flees from truth.
 Neither the fear of sin nor shame
 Could prevent her from lying.
 414 When she sees that there is no escape
 And that she must name her lover
 —Since her father wants to know
 Who has caused her pregnancy—

- 418 She gives this evil answer:
 "I will not hide it any more.
 I know Brother Marin very well.
 On his return trip
 422 On the cart of the abbey,
 He stopped here.
 It is he who made me pregnant.
 No other man has ever touched me.
 426 He has deceived me
 And is the cause of my distress.
 I thought he was a religious man
 And was eager to converse with him.
 430 But he is so malicious
 That he induced me to sin,
 Causing me to fall into shame.
 I mistook his intentions."
 434 When the father heard these words,
 He did not see that they were lies and deceits.
 His anguish is deep.
 He is outraged by the fact
 438 That a man of religion
 Has caused the downfall of his daughter.
 He is determined
 Not to let this go unpunished.
 442 He will go and complain to the abbot.
 At once, he departs from his inn
 And goes to the abbot.
 The brothers recognize him.
 446 He asks to be taken to the abbot
 So as to present his complaint.
 "Lord," he says to the abbot, "hear me!
 I come to you in great distress.
 450 I have been deceived
 In a most awful way
 By Brother Marin,
 Whom you had sent
 454 To the sea.
 He stopped at my inn,
 As the monks riding your cart usually do.
 My daughter thought
 458 That he was a devout man.
 She trusted him,
 But he abused her in such a manner
 That she is now pregnant.
 462 My dismay is such
 That I beg you

- To avenge me for this act,
 Done in a most vile way.
 466 You are yourself shocked by this news.
 I will not be content
 As long as I see my daughter shamed,
 She whom I love more than anything.
 470 One can recover lost goods,
 But this sort of good cannot be retrieved.
 I am put to shame.
 My name is dishonored,
 474 Because of my daughter's disgrace:
 And the guilty party is from your house."
 The abbot has listened.
 He remains silent for a moment, then answers:
 478 "Never has any one of our brothers
 Been the subject of such an accusation.
 Bring Brother Marin at once."
 One of the brothers fetches Marin
 482 And sends him to the abbot,
 Who talks to him in this way:
 "Brother Marin," he says, "hear me!
 Who would have thought that of you?
 486 This man here has brought a complaint against you,
 Accusing you of having caused his daughter's pregnancy.
 How could you do such a thing,
 You who live among us!
 490 And what caused you to commit an act
 Which will bring us so much trouble?
 It is difficult for me to imagine
 That you could hide in your heart
 494 So much evil.
 I do not know whom to believe.
 Is this true? Tell me,
 Swearing on what you hold most dearly."
 496 Looking at the ground,
 Marin sighs and wonders
 How he should answer
 To those who want to accuse him.
 500 Yet he does not lose his wisdom,
 Invoking Jesus Christ
 And remembering how He was accused
 Without ground, and condemned to death.
 504 This thought comforts him and he answers:
 "Good father, I have heard
 How you accuse me of having sinned.
 In God's name, have pity!

- 508 I have sinned—I do not want to deny it—
 More than I could tell you.
 My sins are greater in number
 Than the grains of sand on the shore.
 512 I cannot say or describe
 How prone I am to sin,
 Nor how often I failed.
 Yet I do not lose courage,
 516 For God is so compassionate
 And so powerful
 That He will forgive me my sins
 And will henceforth protect me from downfall,
 520 On account of my repentance and contrition.
 May no one else but me
 Be blamed and accused,
 For I want to suffer the consequences.
 524 I will do as you see fit
 For my penance.
 And may you pray to God for me,
 That He keep me in His mercy.”
 528 Lords, we who sin every day
 Should keep in mind this beautiful reply,
 Admiring Marin’s humility
 And willingness to pay
 532 —Although it was not his debt—
 And to be accused, without anyone to help or comfort him.
 His desire to test himself
 Is comparable to David’s,
 536 In that both were eager,
 In the name of our Creator,
 To endure wrong and dishonor.
 I would not know where to find
 540 Such a courageous heart.
 For he who hides evil within him
 Cares not to bear the other’s wrong.
 Nor do we want to be accused
 544 Of our own faults.
 We do not have the virtue of endurance,
 And pay no heed to the proverb
 That says: ‘He who wishes to test himself
 548 Perspires under the hair shirt.’
 But let us return to the story.
 When the abbot hears Marin’s answers,
 He believes him to be guilty
 552 Of the accusation made against him.
 The abbot feels anger and resentment,

- More than I could tell you.
 He orders that Marin be beaten and whipped,
 556 And imposes on the maiden many torments.
 The holy maiden endures the punishment
 With joy in her heart, for she knows well
 That those who suffer
 560 Are in the company of God.
 This truth
 Assuages her sufferings,
 Since she will be delivered
 564 By Him who suffered for her,
 And since she will gain eternal glory.
 And this thought is indeed worthy
 To those who, in this life,
 568 Endure travail and pain.
 "Brother," says the abbot, "hear me:
 You do not resemble your father
 Who lived among us so saintly.
 572 When you were still very young,
 On account of his holiness
 We welcomed you here.
 But you brought trouble on us.
 576 No one among the present or past brothers,
 Before or during my time as abbot,
 Ever committed such a crime.
 You must leave our house.
 580 We do not care to live in the presence of someone
 Who, like you,
 Wants to lead a debauched life.
 Go away at once,
 584 And never come back to us!
 In the name of the faith I have in God,
 You cannot stay here any longer,
 For our brothers
 588 Could be stained by your dissolute ways."
 When the holy maiden hears
 That she must leave the convent,
 Great is her anguish.
 592 She throws herself on the ground
 And implores the abbot:
 "In the name of God's compassion,
 If I have sinned, I will not any more,
 596 And will make whatever amends you order.
 May he who deals with justice and right
 Show his compassion!
 In God's name, have pity!

- 600 Punish my body:
 No suffering or abstinence
 Would be too great for me to endure.
 I do not fear pains or torments.
 604 I could withstand any tortures,
 If I were allowed to stay here."

(Marina now invokes the parable of the Prodigal Son in an attempt to convince the abbot. But his mind is made up, and she must go.)

- 666 She came to the door of the abbey.
 It was open for her and she went outside.
 But she decided in her heart
 Never to go further away,
 670 But to remain outside the door until her death.
 Sad, anguished, weeping,
 She stayed by the door night and day.
 Enduring the heat and the cold,
 674 She often felt hunger and thirst.
 Her bed was the earth,
 And her only cover, the sky.
 Her garment was sorry and torn.
 678 She lived that way for three years,
 Enduring the torment of hunger,
 And surviving on a daily piece of bread,
 For that was all she would get
 682 From her begging.
 No writing, no story
 Could describe her shames and pains.
 Everyone would mock her and point at her.
 686 No one ever showed her pity.
 Yet never once came out of her mouth
 The words that could have saved her.
 Every time the abbot passed before her,
 690 She would turn toward him,
 On her knees, arms stretched out,
 Begging for his mercy.
 Lords, you who have heard
 694 The lives of many saints,
 You know how some saints had the virtue of patience,
 How others showed true humility,
 And how some suffered martyrdom.
 698 But I know, or have read, of no saint
 Ever to be found,
 Who behaved so well,
 And displayed more constancy or more virtue,

- 702 If I except the Holy Virgin
 In whom Jesus wanted to live.
 For no one born of man
 Can be compared to Her.
- 706 God made Her the treasurer
 Of all existing grace.
 But, after Mary, in my opinion,
 There is no saint greater than Marina.
 [. . .]
- 739 We will leave Marina for a while
 To return to the girl
 Who had wrongly accused her
- 742 And had caused her to be banished.
 This girl remained with her father
 Until the birth of her son
 Whom she nursed for the first three years.
- 746 The father was pained
 To see his daughter nursing,
 As required by the infant's age.
 But as soon as its age permitted
- 750 That he get rid of him,
 He had the infant carried away from his house
 And brought straight to the abbey.
 For he knew indeed
- 754 That the abbot had thrown
 Brother Marin out of the monastery,
 And that Marin was doing his penance,
 At the abbey's door.
- 758 He took the child to Marin,
 Since he truly believed
 Marin to be his father,
 According to his daughter's words,
- 762 Who had deceived him through her lies.
 He came to the abbey's door
 And said angrily:
 "Brother Marin," he said, "hear me!
- 766 Sin has led you to this state.
 But all tales have an end.
 You should be ashamed
 Of finding yourself cast out of such a holy congregation,
- 770 On account of your debauchery!
 But what one brews, one drinks,
 Although this kind of drink will never quench your thirst.
 I brought you your bastard son.
- 774 And, I must tell you, I was in a hurry
 To get rid of him.

- It is now your turn to raise him.
 It displeased me greatly, know it for sure,
 778 That I had to feed him all this time.”
 The holy maiden heard these words.
 She did not hasten to reply,
 But first thought about what she would do.
 782 Deeply anguished,
 She could not think of a solution.
 She was aware that this affair
 Would not help her reconciliation with the abbot.
 786 She was also aware of her own poverty.
 Since she had barely enough for herself,
 What could she give
 To this child that was brought to her?
 790 She wept and lamented,
 But faith and hope gave her strength
 So that her fear soon subsided.
 Her charity was so great
 794 That the wind of adversity
 And the stream of tribulation
 Turned into joy.
 The innkeeper who had brought the child
 798 —Having said what he had in mind—
 Left and returned home,
 Leaving the crying infant behind.
 When the holy maiden saw the child
 802 —She who was filled with charity,
 Free of any sin,
 Most compassionate,
 Pure and innocent,
 806 Humble and patient—
 She took the child with her.
 She would share with him
 The meager food given to her.
 810 She spent a long time there, at the door,
 Living a life of poverty.
 Everyone of high or low status
 Would laugh at her.
 814 I do not know how
 She was able to endure it.
 The world must indeed admire her.
 For one could look everywhere
 818 But would never find
 Someone as patient as she.
 All the brothers came to know
 That the innkeeper had brought

- 822 His daughter's illegitimate child
 To Brother Marin, the penitent,
 And that Marin had taken the child
 Without a word of complaint.
- 826 In the opinion of the brothers,
 If Marin had not been guilty,
 He would never have shown such compassion,
 Would not have been punished,
- 830 And would not have accepted this treatment.
 Yet, regardless of his sin,
 The brothers felt pity for him
 And said among themselves
- 834 That he was punishing himself too harshly.
 They thought that his ordeal
 Had lasted long enough.
 The whole congregation was thus bemoaning
- 838 The austerity of Marin's existence,
 Whenever they talked about him.
 Together, the brothers came to their abbot
 And spoke to him humbly, saying:
- 842 "Our father, our trust is with you!
 We wish to present you with a request
 On which we all agree.
 Please forgive
- 846 Our brother who lives outside our door!
 He has suffered for so long
 And has endured so much
 That there is no one
- 850 Who could not pity him.
 It is time for you to welcome him back,
 On account of his devout attitude,
 Within our congregation."

(The abbot accepts to take both Marin and the child in, and tells Marin that, in expiation of his sin, his duty will be to serve his brothers and to assume the abbey's most menial chores.)

- 974 He who loved her dearly
 Did not let the maiden suffer
 And assume such vile tasks for long.
 The fragrance of her humility
- 978 Had reached the realm of Paradise.
 Touched by her piety,
 The King of kings thus called her:
 "My sister, my spouse, come forward!"
- 982 I do not want to be separated from you any longer,

- But wish to take you into my garden.
 There the vine is in bloom,
 And the dove can be heard.
 986 Fair friend, come to me,
 Enter the chamber of the King!
 The sweetness of your beauty
 Has reached and charmed my heart.
 990 Come, my harmless dove,
 I have prepared Heaven for you.
 The world has been utterly cruel to you,
 And you are all the more deserving.
 994 You are whiter than the lily,
 Your garment is made of silk,
 Your mouth is brighter than blood,
 And your teeth are white and small.
 998 Instead of serving the lowly,
 You must come and be with me."
 The fair maiden desired nothing more
 Than to go to Him who was calling her.
 1002 To kiss Him all day long
 Was her deepest wish.
 His blood was the cause of her virtue,
 Of her purity, and of her whiteness.
 1006 Hearing the voice of her Friend,
 Her soul departed from her body,
 Carried to Heaven by angels
 Who presented her to her Spouse.
 1010 Great were her joy and bliss
 When she found herself in the arms
 Of Him whom she wanted so much.
 I could not put into words,
 1014 And no one could recount,
 Or should describe this event.
 It soon became known
 That Marin had died.
 1018 The brothers got news of it.
 Much surprised,
 They gathered around Marin
 And found him dead indeed.
 1022 They went to the abbot and told him,
 And he answered them:
 "Lords, this shows you
 That you must fear sin.
 1026 This man is an example
 That death can happen suddenly.
 His great sin

- Will cause him trouble and pain,
 1030 Unless God forgives him, as I hope,
 On account of his repentance.”
 The abbot then orders that Marin be disrobed
 And buried outside the abbey.
- 1034 It would not be right to bury his body
 In the holy ground of the abbey.
 They go back to Marin’s body
 To take off his garment,
- 1038 Lay down his body, and wash it.
 And then they discovered
 What had been so well hidden.
 They weep
- 1042 And cry aloud: “What will we do,
 We who have wronged her so?
 No one has ever shown more endurance
 Than she who let herself be wrongly accused!
- 1046 How could this holy soul endure it all?
 We did not know she was a woman.”
 They run to the abbot
 And tell him about their discovery.
- 1050 Accompanying them back to the body, he looks at it
 And throws himself on the ground:
 “Alas, poor me! what will become of me
 Who was so cruel to you,
- 1054 Jesus Christ’s fair spouse?
 No one has ever heard of a woman doing this deed!
 Blessed creature,
 How did you manage to hide your identity?
- 1058 How could you endure
 The pain that was imposed on you
 Wrongly and without good cause?
 Yours will be the final reward, and the failure, mine.
- 1062 You led a holy life
 And are now in a happier state,
 In the company of God,
 Surrounded by His sweetness.
- 1066 In His name, my lady, I beg for your mercy!
 I acted in good faith,
 According to the principles of religion.
 But now I feel wretched,
- 1070 Knowing how much you suffered.
 You hid from me your identity,
 The fact that you were a woman of great virtue.
 No woman was more virtuous than you,
- 1074 If I except the Virgin Mary.”

(The brothers proceed to bury Marina with great honor. The innkeeper's daughter is possessed by the Devil for seven days, until Marina delivers her. The guilty girl then names her child's real father. Marina's fame spreads rapidly, and many people are cured.)

- 1164 He who wants to reach Paradise
 Must acquire the virtue of humility.
 This is the gem
 By which a soul becomes God's spouse.
- 1168 He who wants to be humble
 Soon finds out
 That humility holds
 The key to Paradise.
- 1172 No one can enter without it.
 Some angels were led to fall
 When they forsook humility.
 Indeed, this virtue is to be valued
- 1176 As a promise of great honor.

The Life of Mary the Egyptian

Mary the Egyptian might have lived during the second half of the fifth century. The oldest version of her story is a Greek narrative attributed to Sophronios in the seventh century.¹⁵⁵ In this tale, which evolves around the traditional motif of competitive asceticism, the central character is a monk by the name of Zozimas. After years of austere living, Zozimas discovers another hermit, Mary the Egyptian, who surpasses him in righteousness. The *Vitae Patrum* contain a number of similar tales, including a Latin adaptation of Sophronios' narrative, in which male hermits are led to encounter characters (such as single or married women, merchants, and in one case a flute player) who are inferior in terms of social status but superior in virtue.¹⁵⁶

Sophronios' Greek narrative, which inspired many Latin renditions in verse and in prose,¹⁵⁷ gave rise to two main story lines. In the first one, Zozimas remains the protagonist, while in the second Mary occupies the central position. Both *Mary A* and *Mary B* belong to the second category, with the result that competitive asceticism plays here a much lesser role than in the Sophronios textual tradition.

In addition to the two French poems written in the twelfth century,¹⁵⁸ a number of French renditions of the legend were composed between the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries, in verse and in prose.¹⁵⁹ Redactions of the legend also exist in Spanish¹⁶⁰ and other vernacular languages.¹⁶¹

The twelfth- and thirteenth-century iconographic representations of the legend depict its most spectacular episodes.¹⁶² Mary is seen as a harlot in Alexandria; dipping her hair in the Jordan; covered with a mantle by Zozimas; and buried by Zozimas with the help of a lion. Of the two thirteenth-century French redactions, *Mary B* by Rutebeuf,¹⁶³ a redaction often considered by critics as being more original and personal than *Mary A*, is the poem selected for this Anthology.

Version B

“Ne puet venir trop tart a oeuvre”

Rutebeuf’s poem comprises 1,306 octosyllabic lines in rhyming couplets. The text is preserved in two manuscripts.¹⁶⁴

Rutebeuf wrote his poem between 1248 and 1277, probably before his *Life of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary*.¹⁶⁵ For Baker,¹⁶⁶ Rutebeuf’s main source was one of the two twelfth-century French poems, the anonymous *Mary I*. According to Bujila,¹⁶⁷ Rutebeuf also used three Latin texts, among them the text edited in *PL* (73: 671–90) and that edited in *AASS* (April 1: 77–84). However, the editors Faral and Bastin dismiss as improbable the idea that Rutebeuf could have worked directly from four different sources, and suggest instead that he used a now lost Latin composite text (p. 12), along with a thirteenth-century French prose rendition of the legend.¹⁶⁸

Most of the scholars cited above emphasize Rutebeuf’s authorial presence and praise his ability to eliminate the romanesque traits of the Mary legend in favor of devotional truth. Analyzing the role of tears in Mary’s conversion, Payen underscores the contritionistic value of Rutebeuf’s work, in contrast with the traditionally attritionistic (“through fear”) characteristic of vernacular preaching.¹⁶⁹ Utti shows how Rutebeuf created a new form of vernacular hagiography by fusing his personal and clerical poetic voices,¹⁷⁰ a fusion evinced for instance in the prologue, where the poet stresses the multiple meanings of “work” understood as “good deed” as well as “good craftsmanship.” Recent scholarship analyzes Rutebeuf’s portrayal of Mary as a paradigm of repentance and conversion.¹⁷¹

- It is never too late to undertake a task,
 If one is a good worker and labors relentlessly.
 For the good worker is undoubtedly careful
- 4 Not to work too slowly, especially when he begins belatedly.
 Indeed, he does not linger,
 But sets to work with both hands.
 And his craftsmanship is such
- 8 That he is the first to finish his work.
 I want to tell you of a good worker,
 And to narrate how, in the end,
 Her work was recognized:

- 12 She became entitled
 To enjoy the bliss of Paradise
 On account of her efforts and pains.
 She was from Egypt,
 16 Hence her surname "the Egyptian."
 Her name was Mary.
 She was cured of her illness.
 It was in her soul that she was ill;
 20 And you will never hear of any woman
 More wicked than Mary,
 If I except Mary Magdalene.
 She led a wretched life,
 24 Until Mary the Compassionate
 Called her; then she repented
 And devoted herself to God.
 This woman whose life I recount
 28 (I do not know if she was the daughter of a count,
 Of a king, or of an emperor)
 Caused her Savior's anger.
 When she was twelve years old,
 32 Her beauty was unsurpassable.
 Her body was beautiful, and her face most pleasant.
 This is all I can tell you:
 She was indeed perfect on the outside
 36 And her body was faultless,
 But her heart was vain and inconstant,
 And her mind lacked faithfulness.
 At the age of twelve, she left her father and mother
 40 And started her wicked life.
 She settled in Alexandria
 In order to lead her wretched existence.
 Her body was stained
 44 By three kinds of sins:
 One was drunkenness,
 The second was prostitution,
 And the third, lust.
 48 Her appetite knew no measure:
 She would spend her time
 At games, debauchery, and in sleeplessness,
 In such a way that it was a wonder
 52 How she could lead such a dissolute life.
 She lived in this way for seventeen years,
 Inspired neither by gain,
 Nor by the desire to acquire clothing or money,
 56 Nor to steal others' possessions.
 For prostitution was an aim in itself,

- And she was proud of her prowess,
Rejoicing in her evil deeds.
- 60 To attract as many clients as possible,
She would take care of her appearance.
Thus was her mode of life.
She would welcome cousins, brothers,
- 64 Sons and fathers alike.
Such was the kind of life she led,
And the extent of her wickedness.
[. . .]
- 70 One summer, it happened
That a group of Egyptians,
All good Christians,
Decided to depart from their country
- 74 In order to visit Christ's tomb.
They were from the kingdom of Libya.
They started their journey around Ascension Day,
Which was the customary season
- 78 For the people of this part of the world
To go to Jerusalem.

(Inspired by lust, Mary decides to join the group of pilgrims.)

- 132 How painful it is
To describe her activities!
No man on the boat
Whom she wished to seduce
- 136 Was able to resist the temptation.
Fornication, adultery
—And other acts evil beyond words—
Satisfied her to the fullest.
- 140 Storms or tempests
Did not keep her from doing
Whatever sinful acts pleased her.
And she did not limit herself
- 144 To the company of young men.
Young and old alike,
And chaste men included,
Were moved by her in such a way
- 148 That she conquered them all.
The fact that she was so beautiful
Caused many souls to be lost,
So great was her power of seduction.
- 152 It surprises me a great deal
That the sea, which is pure and clear,
Let her do her sinful deeds,

- And that Hell did not swallow her,
 156 When she disembarked from the boat.
 But God is patient, and His patience
 Caused Him to suffer on the cross.
 He does not want the sinner to die,
 160 But to convert and repent.
 When the boat reached its port,
 The pilgrims rejoiced
 And celebrated their arrival.
 164 But Mary, who only cared for pleasure,
 Games, and satisfaction,
 Went away throughout the city.
 She had nothing of the recluse,
 168 But looked everywhere and visited every place.
 To select foolish men,
 She did not need to wear the fool's bells.
 But her demeanor was indeed foolish,
 172 Both in the way she acted and spoke.
 Her clothing and countenance
 Rendered her intention quite clear.
 If she had done evil before,
 176 She did even worse,
 And surpassed herself
 In becoming more wicked.
 Thus she would show up at church
 180 To select young men,
 Following them up to the threshold,
 Under the inspiration of the Enemy.
 Then came Ascension Day.
 184 All the pilgrims formed a procession
 To go and honor the Holy Cross
 Marked by Jesus Christ's blood.
 Mary decided that, on that day,
 188 She would not act as usual,
 But would spend this holy day
 Away from sin.
 She joined the crowd of the faithful,
 192 Standing in their midst
 To adore the Cross,
 Without delay.
 Arriving at the church,
 196 She found herself unable
 To go beyond its threshold,
 But was, against her will,
 Thrown back
 200 Amidst the people coming behind her.

She tried again,
 To no avail:
 Each time she would come
 204 Close to the church entrance,
 Despite her will,
 She would be thrown back again.
 At this point, Mary becomes aware
 208 That she will never succeed:
 The more she tries to enter,
 The further back she is thrown.
 She says to herself:
 212 "Alas! How small,
 How foolish, and how wicked the tribute
 I have so far given to God!
 I have not served Him,
 216 But I have enslaved my body
 And lost my soul.
 The earth should swallow me.
 Sweet Lord God, I understand now
 220 That my body is not worthy
 To enter such a holy place,
 On account of my sins.
 Alas! God, Lord of the sky,
 224 When Judgment Day arrives,
 At the time when You judge the living and the dead,
 You will condemn my wicked and stained body.
 My soul will be sent to Hell,
 228 And so will my body, after the Judgment.
 My sin is written on my face.
 How could I stop crying?
 How could I stop lamenting and weeping?"

(An image of the Virgin Mary stands at the entrance of the church. Falling to her knees, Mary the Egyptian wets the ground with her tears and confesses her sins.)

349 She says: "Lady, I promise You
 And make this pledge
 That I will no longer sin.
 352 Receive my pledge, for I will not fail you.
 And show me where to go,
 So that I may flee this world
 So perilous for those who want to remain chaste."
 356 A voice begins to talk
 And answers her: "You will go from here
 To the chapel of Saint John.
 You will then cross the Jordan.

- 360 As a penance I ask you
 That you first confess
 All the sins you committed.
 Next, you will cross the Jordan,
 364 And you will find a thick forest
 Beyond the river.
 You will enter this forest
 And do your penance
 368 To repent for your misdeeds.
 There you will remain until death,
 And you will then go to Heaven.”

(Mary does as ordered, arrives at the chapel where she receives communion, enters the forest, and starts walking in the direction of the east.)

- 431 Enduring thirst and hunger,
 432 Surviving on bread and water
 She soon became like a wild woman.
 [. . .]
 439 Her dress is now in shreds
 From the harshness of the weather.
 She has worn it for so long,
 442 Through winters and summers,
 Rains, heat, and wind,
 That its front is in rags.
 There is not one piece intact,
 446 In front or in the back.
 Her hair has grown,
 No longer artfully arranged.
 [. . .]
 452 Her flesh becomes as dark as the swan's feet,
 And her breast mossy
 Because of the rains.
 Her arms, fingers, and hands
 456 Are now blacker
 Than ink or pitch.
 She would cut her nails with her teeth.
 It seems as if her stomach has disappeared
 460 So severe is her fasting.
 Her feet are cut
 And her soles bloody,
 For she walks on thorns,
 464 Not following any marked path.
 And when a thorn would hurt her,
 She would pray to God.
 She lived in this way

- 468 For thirty years, naked.
 Two rather small loaves of bread
 Were at first her only sustenance.
 During the first year, these became as hard
 472 As a stone wall.
 And every day Mary would eat
 Only a fraction of these loaves.
 [. . .]
- 478 She would take no other food
 But the meager grass of the ground,
 Like a mere beast.
 She would drink directly from the stream,
 482 Having no vessel.
 She had no more sin to confess,
 Forcing in this way her body
 To do penance and to suffer.
- 486 The grass became her only nourishment.
 The Devil did not fail to tempt her,
 Reminding her of the deeds
 In which she used to find pleasure.
 490 Again and again, he would say:
 "Mary, what has become of you,
 And what are you doing here naked?
 Leave this forest, go away!"
- 494 You were foolish to come here.
 You showed no care for your body,
 Coming here without any food.
 One would rightly think it is madness
 498 To come and live this austere existence."
 The lady would hear the Devil,
 And would know his words to be lies.
 She has trained herself to live purely
 502 So much so that she forgets everything about her former evil
 ways.
- She has no remembrance of the past, and no care
 For the temptations of the world.
 So used has she become to living in this wasteland
 506 And to feeding herself in this way,
 And so protected is she by her Advocate,
 Who comes and watches over her,
 That she is careful not to sin
 510 Or to relapse.
 Every day of the first seven years,
 The Devil attempted
 To lure her in this way.
 514 But when he realized that she would not heed

- His words, his arguments,
 His ruse, and his attempts,
 He henceforth left her
 518 And forgot all about her.
 I will now leave the lady
 Who was forsaking her body to save her soul,
 In order to tell you about a holy people
 522 Leading a life of fasting and prayers.
 They belonged to the Church of Palestine
 And were most praiseworthy.
 Among these monks there was a man
 526 Whose name was Zozimas.
 He was very devout,
 Had no concern for material goods
 And only cared to lead a pious life.
 [. . .]
 561 One day, as he was meditating
 About his religious existence,
 Pride inspired in him these thoughts:
 564 "I do not know of anyone
 Who could see anything evil in me,
 Or who could teach me anything.
 There is no one, wise as he may be,
 568 Or trained in the monastic life,
 Who is worth me in this part of the world.
 I am the grain, they only are the straw."
 In saying so,
 572 And in thus praising himself,
 Zozimas was being tempted by vainglory.
 Jesus Christ remembered him
 And sent him a spiritual messenger
 576 To tell him these words:
 "Zozimas, it is true that you have done well,
 And that you have become a good monk.
 When you say that you have reached perfection,
 580 In words and in acts,
 It is true indeed, insofar as you have followed your rule.
 Yet there is another path to salvation.
 And if you want to find it,
 584 Leave your monastery, depart from your land,
 And stop praising yourself,
 For pride only leads one astray.
 Do as Abraham did
 588 Who suffered for God,
 Fled to a chapel
 To learn God's ways,

And crossed the Jordan.

592 Do as he did at once."

“Sweet Lord God,” answered Zozimas,

“Glorious Father, You who have
Visited me through Your angel,

596 I will do as you command!"

(Zozimas goes to a chapel near the Jordan and joins a group of poor cenobites, leading their ascetic mode of life. One of these monks' customs is to prepare themselves for Easter by going into the desert, each on his own. Zozimas thus finds himself in the midst of the forest.)

745 Having finished his noon prayers,

Zozimas turned around

And looked toward the east.

748 He saw a shadow,

Not knowing if it was of a man or a woman.

The shadow was in fact that of the good lady

[Mary the Egyptian].

God had decided that she should be seen.

752 And no longer remain hidden.

He wanted to show this treasure,

And had a good reason for doing so.

When the good man saw the shape,

756 He ran toward it.

As for Mary, she felt joy

To see a human figure.

Yet she also felt shame

760 And was prompt to flee.

She fled at once,

But the man followed her,

Feeling neither old age,

764 Reticence, or fatigue.

He ran as fast as he could,

Despite his lack of strength,

Calling for her and saying: "Friend,

768 In God's name, do not make me

Run after you, do not tire me out,

For I am weak and cannot reach you.

I ask you in the name of God the King

772 To slow down.

I beg you—in the name of Him

Who never ignores anyone,

And for Whom you endure this harsh life

776 And let yourself be consumed in this desert,

And Whose forgiveness you await—

- To hear me and listen to me.”
 When Mary heard him mentioning the name of God,
 780 For whose glory she had retired to this desert,
 Weeping, she raised her hands
 In the air, and waited for him.
 They were separated by a river,
 784 Which often flowed through,
 Forming a ravine.
 She who had no vestment, no garment,
 No cloth or cover of any kind,
 788 Did not dare show herself
 And told him: “Father Zozimas,
 Why did you chase after me?
 I am a woman, naked;
 792 This shames me deeply.
 Throw me some garment,
 And I will let you see me
 And will talk to you,
 796 Since I do not wish to hide from you.”
 When Zozimas heard his name,
 He was greatly surprised.
 And he at once knew
 800 That God had allowed this to happen.
 He gave her one piece of his clothing
 And waited.
 Once she had covered herself,
 804 She told him these words:
 “Lord,” says she, “honest friend,
 I see clearly that God brought you here
 So that we could converse together.
 808 I do not know what you see in me,
 But I am a sinner,
 The murderer of my own soul.
 On account of the sins, misdeeds,
 812 And evil acts I committed,
 I came here to do penance.”
 When Zozimas heard this,
 He was much surprised,
 816 Astonished, and dismayed.
 He threw himself to his knees,
 And began to venerate her,
 Asking for her blessing.
 820 She said: “The proper way would be
 For me to ask your blessing,
 Since I am a woman, and you a man.”
 Each one thus started to ask

- 824 For the other's blessing.
[. . .]
- 838 "It would not be proper for me to precede
You in anything, Lord Zozimas.
You are a priest, thus you must start.
Whomever you bless
842 Will be much sanctified."
[. . .]
- 849 "My lady," answers Zozimas,
"You will not be blessed by me
And I will not get up,
852 But will let April and May pass,
Will suffer hunger, thirst and pain,
Unless you bless me first."
Then Mary realizes
856 That she could not convince him.
He will not get up before she blesses him,
Whatever hardship it could cost him.
Turning herself toward the east
860 She began to pray to God:
"Lord," she said, "compassionate King,
I pray to You and I praise You.
Good man, may you be blessed,
864 You and your virtue!
Lord, forgive our sins,
And grant us Your kingdom,
That we may see You
868 And be blessed by You!"
Zozimas stood up,
Tired from having run so much.
They now talk together,
872 Looking at each other.
Zozimas then tells her: "Sweet lady,
Do not forget the Holy Church.
You should pray for Her,
876 For She is nowadays in great need."
The good woman began to pray
And to meditate.
Zozimas was unable to hear
880 The prayers she addressed to God.
But he saw very clearly
That she was lifted from the ground
A distance greater than a knife's length.
884 She remained thus all during her prayers.
Zozimas was so dismayed
That he felt deceived:

- She could well be a witch.
 888 He called for God, the heavenly King,
 And drew himself back a little
 While she was still meditating.
 But she then talked to him:
 892 "Lord, I have no wish to hide anything from you.
 You think that I am a ghost,
 An evil spirit intent on
 Deceiving you, hence your drawing back.
 896 Indeed I am not, Father Zozimas.
 I am here to do penance
 And to be forgiven by God.
 And I will stay here until death
 900 And will never leave this place."

(Mary now proceeds to tell Zozimas her story. She then asks Zozimas to come back one year from now and to bring her communion. Next Easter, Zozimas stands by the Jordan and sees Mary miraculously crossing the river without getting wet. She asks him to come back the year after, and not to let her story be known. But before the year elapses, Mary dies.)

- 1157 The good woman lay on the ground
 Since there was no one to bury her.
 But no predator, no vermin,
 1160 Attempted to approach her body.
 God thus protected her
 So that her flesh did not decay.
 Zozimas did not forget,
 1164 Once back at his abbey.
 But one thing troubled him greatly
 And grieved him,
 Namely, that he did not know at all
 1168 How she was called.
 When a year passed,
 Zozimas again crossed the river.
 Throughout the forest, he looks for the lady
 1172 Who is still lying on the ground.
 He seeks her everywhere,
 Going in circles.
 She is near him, but he does not know it.
 1176 "What will I do if God does not hear me
 And tell me where to find her?
 I do not know what to do!"
 [. . .]
 1189 Having prayed to Jesus Christ
 —According to our source—
 A sudden bright light, a sudden great fragrance

- 1192 Let him discover the devout woman.
 With one of his garments,
 He wraps her,
 Kisses her feet tenderly,
 1196 And feels filled with divine bliss.
 He then examines her,
 And sees a writing by her head,
 Revealing her name:
 1200 "This is Mary the Egyptian."
 He now takes her body,
 And proceeds to bury it,
 Giving thanks to our Lord
 1204 For having thus honored him.
 But he would have liked
 For someone to dig
 A hole in the ground.
 1208 Suddenly,
 He sees a lion coming.
 Great is his dismay.
 But noticing the animal's humble appearance
 1212 And the fact that it was not about to attack him,
 Zozimas knew that God had sent it.
 He tells the lion: "Sweet friend,
 This lady was called Mary,
 1216 And led a most sanctified life.
 I ask you to help me bury her
 And to put your strength
 To digging a hole in the ground."
 1220 At these words, the animal
 Sinks his paws into the soil,
 Using also his nose.
 He digs up a great amount of earth
 1224 And of sand, more than a man could do.
 The hole is now deep and ready
 To receive this pure and good lady.
 When the ground is thus prepared,
 1228 The holy hermit lifts up her body,
 His hands holding her head,
 And the lion holding her feet.
 Together they set the body in the grave
 1232 And cover it very carefully.

(Zozimas returns to his monastery and narrates the miraculous events concerning this holy lady.)

- 1283 When the monks heard the story,
 They knew that Zozimas' words were not vain.

- Hands clasped, they prayed to God
 1286 And gave Him thanks and praise.
 Each of them henceforth changed his ways
 Because of Mary's miraculous adventures.
 And all of us must also change
 1290 As much as we can.
 Let us not wait until death,
 For we would then find ourselves deceived and condemned,
 Like one who repents too late,
 1294 When the rope is already around his neck.
 Let us now pray to this saint
 Who suffered greatly in God's name
 That she pray for us to the Lord
 1298 —Who in the end gave her such honor—
 That He allow us to know eternal joy
 Beside our spiritual Father.
 As for me whose name is RUTEBEUF
 1302 (A name which combines "rude" and "ox"),
 Who have put this Life into rhyme,
 May this most holy woman
 Pray to Him whose friend she is
 1306 That He not forget Rutebeuf!
 Amen.

Version A

"Ore entendez pur Deu amour"

Comprising 407 octosyllabic lines in rhyming couplets, this anonymous poem is preserved in a single manuscript.¹⁷²

The language of *Mary A* is Anglo-Norman and its date of composition can be set between 1230 and 1250, according to Kjellman (p. cxxviii) who also publishes its twelfth-century Latin source.¹⁷³ The following translation is based on Dembowski's edition.¹⁷⁴

Summary

You, lords, who are sinners, listen to the story of an exemplary woman. If you listen well, you will repent. It is the story of Mary the Egyptian. (ll. 1–12)

You know her life: she stayed with her father as a young girl, and was only twelve when she started to lead a wicked existence. She enjoyed it so much that she fled to Alexandria, welcoming young and old men, who would kill each other for her love. She had lost all modesty and found her pleasure everywhere, on sea, on land, night and day. (ll. 13–44)

She thus spent seventeen years in Alexandria. It then happened that a pilgrimage to Jerusalem was organized. Mary decided to join the pilgrims, not out of devotion, but because she wanted to exert her evil influence. God let her reach Jerusalem. On the Day of the Holy Cross, she followed the pilgrims to church but was unable to enter. Outside the door, Mary started pondering, saw on the wall a painting of the Virgin Mary, and wept, asking for Mary's forgiveness. At last able to enter the church, she prayed to God, then went back to the painting, where she was told by a voice to go beyond the Jordan. Mary swam across the river, went to the desert, and lived in almost total abstinence for forty years. (ll. 45–236)

God then sent to her a monk of great piety to hear her confession and give her communion. His name was Zozimas and he would go each year to spend Lent in the desert. He discovered Mary, who told him her story. On his third visit, he found her dead, saw on the ground a message telling him to bury her, and was assisted by a lion. (ll. 237–381)

Thus ended the life of this good woman, whose story illustrates the merits of conversion. Like Mary Magdalene, she was bad; but the Virgin Mary saved her. Let us therefore sing in honor of the Virgin Mary. Let us pray to the Mother and to Her Son, that they may help us live in repentance. (ll. 382–407)

The Life of Saint Paula

“En proverbes li vileins dit”

This anonymous poem comprises 1,243 octosyllabic lines in rhyming couplets and is preserved in a single manuscript.¹⁷⁵ Grass, the editor of this Life, also publishes the Latin source of the poem, namely, the fifth-century account written by Saint Jerome.¹⁷⁶ The anonymous poet tells his audience that he was asked by a “good man” to translate this Life for a “lady” (ll. 78–79), as an edifying example for women (ll. 1223–43). He probably composed his rendition of the life of Paula at the end of the thirteenth century,¹⁷⁷ around the year 1290.¹⁷⁸

Along with Elizabeth of Hungary, Paula is truly unique in the context of thirteenth-century French hagiographic romance. First, she is not a legendary woman, but a real life individual who was born in Rome around 345. Secondly, her life is documented through direct testimony. Lastly, she and Elizabeth are the only two characters in this volume to have experienced marriage and motherhood. The death of Paula’s husband, the Roman senator Toxotius (whom the poet calls “Rogatus,” l. 231), when she was about thirty-three left her a widow with five children. Encouraged by her friend, Saint Marcella, Paula joined a group of wealthy Roman ladies and led a pious and studious life under the guidance of Jerome. In 385, she and her daughter Eustochium followed the latter to the Holy Land, where Paula took charge of Jerome’s women followers. Settling in Bethlehem, she built a communal house for them, as well as a hospice for pilgrims. She knew Greek, learned Hebrew to sing the psalms, and was a fervent adept of self-mortification. She died on January 26, 404, and was buried in Bethlehem beneath the church of the Nativity.

Paula’s life is an interesting source of information concerning the devotional behavior of a typical noble woman in fourth-century Rome. The same is true of the life of Elizabeth of Hungary with respect to thirteenth-century aristocracy. In the French renditions of their stories, however, their portrayal is quite conventional, therefore lacking realism and authenticity. For instance, the thirteenth-century French poet creates a mythical back-

ground for Paula casting her as a descendant of Saint Paul (l. 109) and Aeneas (l. 230). Another conventional feature is the treatment of the protagonist's conjugal and matrimonial experience. To attain perfection, Paula must, like Elizabeth in Rutebeuf's poem, lose her husband, abandon her children, and obey the dictates of a male counselor in order to be transformed into God's "friend and spouse" (ll. 1110–11).

- In the proverbs of folklore
 —Where we can find many wise sayings—
 It is said that one who has not laboured
- 4 Is not worth a thing,
 As can be seen in one's work.
 This goes to prove that, indeed,
 "Everyone can and must work!"
- 8 To show one's worth,
 One must show one's goodness.
 For many have increased in value,
 Who would otherwise have remained unknown,
- 12 If they had not proved themselves each day.
 He who can accomplish this will be safe.
 Death will not prevent
 Him from being known afterwards.
- 16 Death will not trap one who is good;
 His goodness will never die.
 Can he be said to be dead, he whose fame
 Is remembered every day,
- 20 And whose name remains forever known?
 No, for his renown keeps him alive.
 And the wise man says in his book:
 "Although his flesh is in the ground,
- 24 The good man survives through his fame."
 For this reason, I want to undertake a task
 And to devote my energy
 To a project, which I deem worthy.
- 28 In this attempt, I am bold,
 For I am trying to do something
 That I have never done before.
 But one must apply
- 32 All of one's energy
 And show what one has to show
 To the best of one's ability.
 And no one in his right mind
- 36 Could reproach me for undertaking this task,
 Or could accuse me of being presumptuous.
 But there are always envious people

- Who see evil in everything,
 40 Whether good or bad.
 Envy is a most awful sentiment.
 As Horace reminds us,
 Envy is the most painful emotion,
 44 Even for tyrants.
 But I care not about envious people,
 And I do not fear their envy.
 A good man inspired me to undertake this task.
 46 It would indeed be harmful to me
 If I did not respond to his request,
 And if I turned him down,
 As one who is proud,
 52 Even if I were not inspired by pride.
 But I can tell you this: it is the opposite case,
 For I feel honored by his request.
 The truth is, whoever serves a good man,
 56 Also serves himself.
 This is why I agreed to his request
 And undertook to compose a 'mirror'
 Made neither of glass nor of wood.
 60 I will now briefly describe this mirror,
 To insure that you understand
 Its symbolic significance.
 It is a most beautiful mirror.
 64 The lid covering it,
 Which is very well carved,
 Shows no flowers, trees, or human beings.
 I could not name its colors,
 68 No one could except a cleric.
 Its decorations consist
 Of the good words used in this narrative.
 Its oval frame, which is very pure,
 72 Represents a most holy creature,
 A woman so saintly and so good
 That there was no holier lady in her days.
 I have described and portrayed her well.
 76 I found her Life in a collection of stories
 With great exemplary value;
 Hence the good man's request for a work
 Which he will offer to a lady.
 80 Here is a good mirror for the soul.
 For she who looks in it carefully
 Will avoid daily such sins
 As folly, pride, and meanness.

[. . .]

- 109 She was born of the ancestry of Saint Paul,
 And was named Paula after him.
 Her name does evoke the word "pale,"
 112 But Paula was just the opposite.
 There was nothing pale in her,
 But only the rich colors of goodness.
 [. . .]
 205 You could not find a woman
 More deserving of praise than she.
 Just as stars lose their brightness
 208 In the summer days,
 When the sun shines
 At noontime, or
 When the candle, lit
 212 Near the fire of the fireplace,
 Is defeated by its light,
 So did Saint Paula dim
 —Such was her repute—
 216 The fame of other women.
 Yet she was not looking for vain honor,
 But held herself humbly,
 Attempting to stay away from worldly renown.
 220 She was thus on the right path,
 And indeed deserved recognition
 Since she had only contempt for glory.
 For he who flees from glory is followed by glory;
 224 He who chases it away is found by it.
 Thus, he who wants to find glory
 Must live without seeking it.
 We have told you
 228 Of her goodness.
 We will tell you now of her lineage.
 She was of the ancestry of Aeneas,
 And one Rogatus married her.
 232 They had five children,
 A son, and four daughters
 Who were courteous, wise, and beautiful.
 Blaesilla, Eustochium, Paulina,
 236 And the fourth one, Rufina:
 These were the names of the daughters,
 And the son was called Toxotius.
 When her husband died,
 240 Paula felt such sorrow
 That she almost died.
 But her mind was so set
 On living for God

- 244 That one could have thought
—Not knowing her feelings—
That she was glad of her husband's death.
The wealth of her domain
- 248 Was such, that no one could surpass it.
But her compassion and charity
Inspired her to give up her wealth.
In order to help the poor,
- 252 She was willing to endure poverty.
She would feed and clothe the destitute,
And be a mother to the motherless.
She would assist poor clerics,
- 256 And give them all her attention.
To do good was her pleasure,
And she thought that she was not doing well
If she did otherwise.
- 260 She would distribute her inheritance in God's name,
Disinheriting her own children.
Every day she would teach them
To love only God
- 264 And to seek no other inheritance.
She would flee those who praised her,
For she had no care for glory
And was not looking for honor.
- 268 Then it so happened that,
Through God's grace, there came to Rome
Two holy bishops,
One from Egypt and one from Antioch.
- 272 Both bishops came to know her,
And preached to her so well,
That she resolved
To devote herself
- 276 To following their teaching.
Winter disappeared, summer returned.
At that point, the two bishops decided
To end their sojourn and to leave.
- 280 They do not want to prolong their stay.
Saint Paula is so determined
To stay with her two friends
That nothing else matters to her.
- 284 She accompanies them to the harbor.
Her own children follow her, weeping,
Beating themselves, pulling their hair,
Thinking that they can thus move
- 288 Their mother, who is leaving them.
The mariners check

- The stars, draw the sails,
 Pull out, and the ships depart.
 292 The children remain on the shore.
 The son outstretches his arms and cries,
 While Rufina weeps, begging
 Her mother and asking her
 296 To stay and tend to her grief.
 But the mother does not listen.
 Her tearless eyes are looking toward Heaven.
 To the outsider, it seems
 300 That Paula is pitiless and without feeling.
 She seems to lack compassion,
 In thus rejecting everything,
 Her own children, her domain,
 304 And her country. But in fact, she does have feeling,
 One that has inspired her trust in God.
 She cares for nothing else.
 This feeling extinguishes the others,
 308 And pity is vanquished by faith.
 She is indeed fighting her own sorrow.
 For great is her grief,
 And the struggle within her.
 312 For on the one hand, she cannot help but remember
 That she is a mother; but on the other, she is more determined
 than ever
 To serve the Lord God.
 Thus she fought against nature,
 316 Whose call was so strong regarding her children
 That it almost took away her courage.
 She did not look toward the shore
 Because she did not want to see
 320 That which caused her so much grief.
 For no sorrow is greater
 Than the sorrow of a mother
 Who leaves all her children
 324 And departs from her country.
 Saint Paula was comforted
 By the presence of Eustochium, who was
 With her, assuaging her grief.
 328 For she had no one else to console her.
 Her love for Eustochium was so firm
 That she had taken her with her.
 She had abandoned everything,
 332 Allowing only this daughter to come along, in God's name.
 As Saint Jerome recounts,
 Saint Paula thus sailed and reached

- The island of Pontia.
 336 Pagans were then very powerful,
 And many Christians were put to death
 Under the rule of the emperor Domitian.
 On his order,
 340 Two highly noble ladies
 —Euphrosina [a martyr] and Domitilla—
 Had been exiled to this island.
 They had been exiled
 344 Because of their rejection
 Of the false creed and its pagan idols.
 [. . .]
 357 These ladies were so noble
 That the whole island became famous.
 Their nobility and repute
 360 Contributed to its fame.
 Saint Paula was able to see them,
 But did not stay there long.
 For she was most anxious
 364 To go to Jerusalem.

(Paula lands at Cyprus, then goes to Antioch, and is finally on her way to Jerusalem.)

- 395 She decided to ride a donkey,
 Because horses seemed to her too luxurious.
 I will not describe her journey in detail,
 398 Because one would have a hard time believing me,
 Although it is true indeed
 That she went through many castles and cities.
 I do not remember all the names.
 402 She finally reached Jerusalem.
 The king, who knew her people,
 Called all of his servants.
 He had his palace well prepared
 406 Because he wanted to welcome
 Saint Paula with great honor.
 But she had no care for wealth,
 Or for rich comfort,
 410 So saintly was she.
 To avoid too comfortable a setting,
 She elected to live
 In a poor wooden house.
 414 She did not go out often
 —So profound was her devotion—
 Except to go to the places she held so dear,

- The holy sites,
 418 Where she prayed
 With great piety,
 As if she were witnessing the Passion
 Of our Lord, and could see Him dead
 422 On the cross.
 She went to the Holy Sepulcher, where His body was placed,
 And kissed it inside and out,
 Licking the building everywhere,
 426 As one, burning of thirst
 To the point that his body is drying up,
 Must, in order to avoid dying,
 Drink at the fountain.
 430 She reluctantly left this site
 And then went to Mount Sion,
 Where a good man showed her
 The stake where God the Lord was bound
 434 By the Jews and whipped.
 She also visited the place where the Virgin became mother:
 There the Virgin gave birth to Her Father,
 And the ass and the ox
 438 Acknowledged the presence
 Of the Creator, the King, the Master,
 Who deigned to be born of the Virgin.
 Very devoutly, Paula prayed
 442 To God, and with the eyes of her heart she saw
 The Child; the nativity scene; the Mother;
 The bright star above them;
 The kings adoring the Child;
 446 The apostles on their way;
 Herod who, throughout the land,
 Was seeking all the male children
 To have them killed in order to defeat God;
 450 And how Joseph had to flee
 To Egypt, because of the danger,
 Taking away the Mother and Her Son.
 Great was Saint Paula's joy
 454 To be granted to perceive all this.
 She wept at such a sight,
 Moaning, sighing, adoring God
 And saying: "I find comfort in this site.
 458 It is my seat, my respite.
 Here I must rest,
 In this place where He accepted to be born of the Virgin
 And to become man.
 462 For God is the protector of virginity."

(After other journeys in the Holy Land, Paula goes to Alexandria, is well received by the bishop, visits the hermits, and feels inclined to imitate their ascetic mode of life.)

- 530 No woman was ever so ardent
 To serve God and to save her soul.
 Paula forsook her female nature.
 Because of her eagerness and great strength,
 534 She fought against her nature
 And took the monastic habit,
 She and her female companions.
 [. . .]
 541 I want to describe her virtues,
 As I found them in the book.
 Her virtues were such
 544 That no one ever found in her
 Anything to criticize.
 For although her way of living shone forth,
 Humility was her first virtue.
 548 She was so humble
 That it never appeared
 That she was above her female companions,
 Neither through her clothing, her words,
 552 Her vestment nor her behavior.
 Whoever would see her among them,
 Could not distinguish her.
 And know that she was so filled with goodness
 556 That I cannot describe it completely.
 And it is better that I refrain
 For so evil-minded are many people
 That they would hardly believe
 560 That she possessed all these virtues.
 The lady loved her husband so much
 That, after his death, she never ate
 In male company.
 564 And she did not resort to the comfort of a bed,
 Whatever her state of health,
 But lay on the bare ground,
 Using only a sackcloth.
 568 She prayed devotedly
 And incessantly,
 Without taking any rest.
 The lady never bathed
 572 As long as her health permitted,
 Unless illness forced her
 To take a bath.
 She would spend all her time praying,

- 576 Adoring God, and weeping.
 Saint Jerome would admonish her,
 Showing her that she was killing herself
 And destroying her sight.
 580 The saintly lady, hearing
 Our Lord better and better,
 Would answer Jerome:
 "I am doing what is right.
 584 It is just that my face becomes ugly,
 The face that I used to care for
 And whose color used to inspire envy.
 By tending to it, I used to double
 588 The value of what nature gave me!"

(The author now describes Paula's patience in resisting temptations, her contempt for the material world, and the way all memory of her children had left her.)

- 769 I will now describe to you
 The manner in which she practiced her religion.
 She had no concern for the world
 772 And only cared for the joy of Paradise.
 This was her only desire.
 For what the flesh sows, the soul reaps.
 First, the lady had an abbey
 776 Built, where she gathered a number of nuns.
 She made three groups
 Out of the maidens of high and of low lineage
 Whom she had chosen.
 780 She organized their life very wisely,
 Settling each one of the nuns
 In separate abodes.
 She did it so they would never assemble
 784 Except in the church.
 [. . .]
 800 Coming back from the church,
 Each nun would run to her task.
 Each would tend to it with great care,
 Be it to weave cloth
 804 For herself or for her companion.
 And to prevent any complaining,
 They all wore the same habit.
 Clothing made of hemp
 808 Was used only to wipe one's hands.
 One of Paula's requirements was most demanding:
 Whether noble or rich,
 None of the sisters was allowed

- 812 Any company,
 For Saint Paula would forbid it,
 Thinking that nothing should be let in
 That could disturb the order,
 816 Threaten its rule,
 Or remind the sisters of their past life.
 They were not allowed the company
 Of men.

[. . .]

- 880 She was soft toward her companions,
 But harsh with herself.
 She was laboring more than anyone,
 Spending sleepless nights at prayer,
 884 More so than any one of her companions,
 Who were young and healthy.
 She was so rigorous with herself
 That no prayer,
 888 No admonition that was said to her,
 Could convince her to be otherwise.
 She refused to go against the rule of abstinence,
 No matter her health.
 892 Saint Jerome recounts
 How the lady was very ill
 And feverish, one hot summer,
 As she had never been before.
 896 Everyone expected her to die.
 But she would not listen to anyone,
 Be it a friend, a companion, or a doctor,
 And refused, whatever was said to her,
 900 To eat meat and to drink wine,
 Even though her condition could lead to dropsy.
 Jerome was much afflicted
 To see that, in no way,
 904 Under no condition,
 Would Saint Paula do as advised.
 Saint Jerome sent for
 The bishop Epiphanium,
 908 Whom saint Paula loved dearly
 And respected greatly.
 He told Epiphanium about her illness,
 Then took him to her.
 912 But Jerome remained outside, to hide from
 Paula that he had concocted this visit.
 Saint Epiphanium went inside.
 Paula saw him and greeted him with joy.
 916 He sat down and proceeded to reproach her

For the harshness of her abstinence,
 As it was beyond measure and good sense,
 And harmful to her.

(But it is Paula who convinces Epiphanius of the value of abstinence. Her weakness increases, but she persists in her mode of living. Paula and her daughter Eustochium express the desire to learn Hebrew. Jerome becomes their teacher.)

- 1006 The holy man spent so much of his time,
 And of his knowledge teaching them,
 That they soon learned Hebrew
 And were able to say prayers in their original language.
- 1010 Saint Jerome is the one who gave them this ability.
 Eustochium, who was not poor,
 Decided that she had no care
 For material possession.
- 1014 She wanted no part of the inheritance
 That was hers after her mother left Rome.
 She was so inspired by her mother
 That she forsook everything.
- 1018 Saint Paula felt great joy
 When she heard
 That a niece of hers had started singing Alleluia
 While still in her cradle.
- 1022 In a clear and soft voice,
 She had said the name of her aunt.
 Paula's deepest desire
 Was to see her son, his wife,
- 1026 And the wife's mother forsake the world
 And become God's servants.
 Her wish was partly fulfilled,
 Since her niece became a nun,
- 1030 And since her daughter-in-law made a vow a chastity
 That she kept for the rest of her life.

(The time of Paula's death arrives, to Eustochium's deep sorrow. During her agony, Paula never ceases to pray and to rejoice.)

- 1070 Alas, Death! We should hate you,
 Who dared to conquer such a lady.
 Conquer? Does it mean she died?
 No, indeed! She never died.
- 1074 I declare that she did not die,
 But went from death to life.
 During her agony,
 Her suffering was never so great

- 1078 As to prevent her from reciting the psalms,
From crossing herself, and from praying to God.
She was most anxious to tell Him these words:
"I have always loved, fair Lord,
1082 The beauty of Your house."
She would also often say to God:
"Lord God, I loved my soul above all things,
As Your tabernacle and joy.
1086 To attain the peace of one's soul,
It is better to be a servant than a lady."
Saint Jerome asked her
Why she was not responding to him.
1090 As he was calling her, asking about her,
And wondering about her silence,
She told him: "I am on my way,
And there is nothing unpleasant, only joy."
1094 Then she said nothing more, but closed her eyes,
Reciting her prayers to herself.
No one could hear her recite, however close to her.
She then made the sign of the cross
1098 Over her face.
She loved God so deeply
That she never stopped praying to Him.
When her suffering would resume,
1102 She was so absorbed by the thought of God
That she did not feel any pain.
She would forget her suffering
And give herself up to God.
1106 The monastery was filled
With monks and nuns
Who grieved,
Thinking that she was dead.
1110 God said to her, and all could hear: "My friend,
My spouse, come toward the life,
Toward the joy, that you sought every day!
It is time for you to be in such a place."
1114 The lady answered most joyfully:
"Bliss is coming for me;
It is time that I follow my Friend
And that I live in the land of the living."
1118 Then the weeping and crying stopped.
No one wept and no one moaned any longer.
But they prepared the lady's body
For burial.

[. . .]

- 1128 The clergy came from everywhere,

- To participate in the service.
 Monks, nuns, hermits arrived.
 Leaving their cells and hermitages,
 1132 Their abbeys and their abodes,
 They arrived in great numbers,
 Prelates, abbots and bishops,
 As well as archbishops,
 1136 To serve the lady.
 The ceremony took place, and they praised her soul.
 Not to be present at the service
 Would have been unthinkable.
 1140 They each prayed in their own tongue:
 Hebrews in the Hebrew language,
 Greeks in Greek, and Latins
 In Latin.
 1144 For three days, they displayed her body.
 On the fourth day, all those who came
 —With much grief and sorrow—
 Performed the burial ceremony.
 1148 Orphans wept for their lost mother;
 Poor people cried; poor clerics prayed
 From their psalters for the soul
 Of their provider and lady.
 [. . .]
 1156 Eustochium took the body in her arms,
 Kissing Paula's nose, face,
 Eyes and mouth. Paula did not seem
 Dead, but rather, asleep.
 1160 For despite the great suffering
 Of death, her complexion had not changed.
 The body remained so firmly upright
 That it was difficult to lay it down in the coffin.
 1164 They put the body in a beautiful tomb
 That they had built,
 Right under the site where God was born.
 There the body was laid to rest.
 1168 What Paula had always desired,
 Was thus accomplished.
 [. . .]
 1210 This romance was done
 To serve as mirror and example,
 And not for entertainment.
 For whoever reads it,
 1214 Must pay attention,
 As one examines, when looking in a mirror,
 One's body, hair, and face.

- If he sees something amiss,
 1218 As he watches himself in the mirror,
 He knows what to amend.
 Such a mirror is useful
 To beautify the body.
 1222 But this mirror is for the souls.
 Ladies should contemplate themselves in it.
 For they can learn a lesson
 —Those who are attentive—
 1226 From how Saint Paula led her life,
 Avoiding covetousness and envy,
 Pride, concupiscence and avarice,
 And conquering every vice through her virtues.
 1230 Children, lineage, glory, wealth,
 And garment, she gave it all up to reach God.
 In accordance with the Gospel,
 She forsook everything to follow God.
 1234 Ladies should act like her,
 And learn from her,
 Following the way of life and behavior
 Of the lady who was so saintly.
 1238 They should pray to her so that, on behalf of those who love,
 Serve, honor, and invoke her,
 She may pray to God, that He may help them
 In their endeavor, and that they may come
 1242 To the bliss and the life
 That she attained when leaving this world.

The Life of Saint Thais

The legend of Thais is a particularly interesting example in the history of the cult of the saints. Although she probably never existed, this famous converted harlot has inspired a vast number of poets and novelists from the fourth to the twentieth century. According to the earliest extant narrative, a Greek text written in the fourth or fifth century, Thais was a notorious prostitute who lived in Egypt toward the middle of the fourth century and was converted by one Sarapion.¹⁷⁹ This Greek text is the origin of a series of adaptations in other languages, including a sixth-century Latin version by Dionysius Exiguus (in which “Sarapion” became “Paphnutius”); a seventh-century Syriac narrative found in a compilation known as the *Paradisus Patrum*; a tenth-century Latin play composed by Hrothsvitha, a German Benedictine nun; an eleventh-century Latin poem by Marbod; Jacobus de Voragine’s Latin prose rendition in the thirteenth century;¹⁸⁰ and numerous vernacular versions.

The name of the protagonist may have been inspired by the Egyptian mistress of Alexander the Great, also called Thais. The story line illustrates the new importance accorded to penance during the fourth century: the City of God was now thought to be open to repentant sinners, and no longer exclusively reserved for the pure and perfect.¹⁸¹ One of the principal proponents of this innovative view of salvation was Saint Anthony the hermit, who attracted many disciples. One among these, whose name was Paphnutius, is said to have contributed to the miraculous healing of a paralyzed girl. Hence the eventual connection between Paphnutius and Thais, the two central protagonists of the legend.

The Latin source of the three thirteenth-century anonymous poems composed in honor of Thais is the *Vitae Patrum*.¹⁸² One of these versions, *Thais A*, is an adaptation of Books 5 and 6 of the *Vitae Patrum*, books which are known as the *Verba Seniorum*, as well as of the story of Thais proper, found in Book 1. Authors of both *Thais B* and *Thais C* based their narratives on a Latin compilation of the *Vitae Patrum* known as the *Vitae Seniorum*.¹⁸³

Iconographic representations of the Thais legend abound. The fame of

“Ce n’est pas ors quanque reluist”

As shown by the number of manuscripts (more than thirty) that preserve this version, *Thais C* was the most popular of the three French poems composed in the thirteenth-century; hence its selection in this Anthology. The Latin source of *Thais C* is the sixth story of the first book of the *Vitae Patrum*, which was translated into French (*Vie des Anciens Pères*) for the benefit of a lay audience by a priest of Champagne after 1250.¹⁸⁴ In the absence of a critical edition of *Thais C*, excerpts of which are found in Nau's article,¹⁸⁵ all of the manuscripts that contain this version of the legend have yet to be identified.

Thais C, a poem of 572 lines written in octosyllabic rhyming couplets, has attracted little critical attention. According to Schwan, the forty-two tales (*Thais C* included) comprised in the first book of the *Vie des Anciens Pères* are lively and entertaining. Contradicting Schwan's assessment, Payen considers *Thais C* the least interesting of the three thirteenth-century French poems because of its overwhelmingly moral dimension.¹⁸⁶

The following translation is based on the manuscript preserved at Chantilly.¹⁸⁷

- All that glitters is not gold.
The tree that bears rich fruit
Must be thinned and pruned,
4 And its branches must be burned.
And the pear that does not ripen,
But remains green and hard,
Must be thrown to the pigs,
8 Since it has proved to be unproductive.
[. . .]
17 We too, when judgment comes,
Will have to account for our deeds.
Each one of us will have to report,
20 And will be assessed accordingly.
He whose return does not add up
—Whether a king or a count—

Will have to spend his time
In the torments of Hell, forever.

[. . .]

- 50 God abandons those who abandon Him.
You who are burdened by many sins,
Should begin to cleanse yourselves
Of the filth in which you stayed too long,
- 54 So as not to lose the brightness
Of Heaven, and its great honor.
For he who loves filth
And serves it,
- 58 Also loses the bliss of Heaven.
You must therefore cleanse yourselves
And get rid of the stain
Of the sins that encumber you,
- 62 Before eternal death takes hold of you.
Whoever does otherwise
Will be granted the proper "reward"
And will lose his soul.
- 66 I now want to tell you of a woman
Who once lived in Egypt.
I will tell you briefly her story.
Her name was Thais,
- 70 And she was a most beautiful and comely maiden.
One could look all over the world,
Without ever finding
A woman quite like her.
- 74 But her beauty was worth nothing,
Until the time she gave it up totally.
She led a miserable life,
As long as everyone could enjoy her body
- 78 In exchange for money.
Clerics, knights, townsmen or lads,
There was no man, ugly as he could be,
To whom she did not give herself
- 82 And who could not enjoy her as he wished.
She wanted beautiful clothes so much
That she feared no sin,
Like women who live in debauchery
- 86 And obtain rich garments in such a way
That they lose eternal bliss,
Or like the mad men—the sons of the Devil—
Who commit such mortal sins
- 90 That they neither improve
Nor fructify in them any spiritual joys,
But help the Devil get richer.
Thus lived Thais,

- 94 Accumulating many lovers,
Holding them and their goods so dear
That she impoverished them
Like a woman who wants it all.
[. . .]
- 106 Thais lived a sinful existence,
Always beautifully dressed,
Welcoming and keeping this one and that,
As long as his purse was full.
- 110 Many died, and many quarrels
Occurred because of her madness.
But this did not keep her
From doing her evil deeds
- 114 And from satisfying her desire.
She was blamed by the good people,
And served and loved by the mad ones.
There was at that time a hermit
- 118 Living nearby, who was trying
To serve God and do good.
He heard many accounts
Of Thais and of her evil ways.
- 122 The desire took him
To know where she lived
So as to try, if he could,
To rid her of her evil ways
- 126 And to convert her to God.
This is why, one day,
He set out to seek her,
And searched so much that he found her.
- 130 Seeing him coming, she got up,
So polite and well-mannered was she.
Her hope was to have found a rich purse,
Not knowing his real intention.
- 134 She put her arms around his neck
And led him to her room.
But he acted as if he was afraid
And said: "Woman, if you agree,
- 138 Take me to a private place
Where no one can come and discover me,
For this would greatly dishonor me."
"Certainly," she says; "trust me,
- 142 I will take you to a place
Where there will be no one except you,
Where no one will know your presence, except God,
And where no one will trouble us.
- 146 No one will know that I am with you, except God
Who sheds light on everything, knows

- The deeds of man, and sees everywhere.”
 “If God knows everything, how
 150 Dare you act so boldly?
 It is not courage, but madness,
 Which incites you to lead such a life.
 You give everything to the Devil,
 154 And you think that God is asleep,
 He who has the power to condemn you.
 [. . .]
 161 “If you do not request God’s peace,
 And if you do not give up the burden
 Which weighs on your shoulders,
 164 Your journey will end in Hell
 —Where you will be condemned forever, naked and blamed—
 If you do not make amends for your life.
 Lady, God cares not for garments.
 168 How could you think that your rich clothes
 Could lead you to a good end,
 If you persisted in your sinful ways?
 The truth, woman, is different.
 172 Never will God receive in Heaven
 A woman who loved sins, and caused the downfall
 Of good men, abandoning goodness.
 And how dare you be so bold
 176 As to remain in a state of sin?
 More than a hundred devils
 —On account of your deeds and shame—
 Are hunting you, day after day.
 180 They live in your presence.
 You are not alone in this world.
 The sins of food and drink
 Are keeping you company,
 184 Although you cannot see them.
 You will not be able to continue your vile ways
 Without being deprived of everything.
 This is why I advise you, in God’s name,
 188 To come back to your senses,
 Before death brings you your reward
 And takes you to your destiny.
 You would repent too late
 192 If you waited until death.”
 Thais felt fright
 And terror in her heart,
 When she heard the good man’s words.
 196 “Alas, poor me!” she said, “alas!
 I am anguished, and yet
 How could I receive forgiveness?

- I have done nothing but evil,
 200 And do not expect any reward
 For I neither think nor believe
 That God could ever forgive me,
 Since I devoted myself
 204 To wrong and evil deeds.
 Were I to spend a hundred years or more
 In an abbey or as a recluse,
 I do not see how I could deserve
 208 Or receive forgiveness.”
 “Thais, as you used to be sinful,
 You will become a pure
 And good Christian
 212 And as bright as light,
 You who acted against reason
 Before deciding to do good.
 If you so wish, I promise you it will be so.
 216 Our Lord sends His grace
 To the sinner who repents
 And who decides to spend his time well.
 As God can take away, God can also give,
 220 And can forgive all sins,
 As He did with Mary Magdalene.
 He delivered her from seven devils
 When she begged Him
 224 And promised to do well.
 These devils were the seven deadly sins.
 God forgave her at once
 And made her His friend,
 228 So that she changed her life.
 Trust me, and act wisely.
 I wager my life against yours
 That you will be granted access to Paradise
 232 If you follow my advice.”
 “Lord, I do not know what to say.
 I am accustomed to comfort,
 And I will not be able to fast
 236 Or to spend the night praying, as a penance,
 Nor will I be able to stay one day
 In the same place.
 This is why I dare not promise
 240 That I will do penance or vigils.
 I will seek another way
 To give up my former ways
 And start doing better.”
 244 “Woman, you deceive yourself.
 If you are really aspiring to goodness,

God will be with you
And will assist you in all good deeds.

[. . .]

- 253 "Begin to do good, and God will do the rest.
To whomever is faithful to Him,
God sends His aid and support.
Everyone should remember that.

[. . .]

- 272 "For the more one serves Him, the more one receives.
Everyone should serve Him devoutly.
If you remain faithful to Him,
You will be forgiven

- 276 And will receive the reward of Paradise."

Thais was thus well instructed,
And the sermon was so eloquent
That she was moved in her heart,

- 280 So much so that she agreed
With the holy hermit's reasoning
And with the arguments he presented her.
She promised to obey him

- 284 And to do whatever he asked her in the name of God.
She then confessed her sins
And acknowledged her evil deeds,
Before the people, publicly.

- 288 For he who acts badly in front of everyone
Must make amends publicly,
Before all, when he repents.

Thus she gave herself to goodness

- 292 And distributed all of her goods.
On the advice of her confessor,
She had the braids of her hair
Shaved completely.

- 296 She changed her appearance
And gave away her attire,
Remaining as naked as a worm.
The hermit gave her a mantle and a hat,

- 300 And took her along.
He found for her a place close to his,
And had her lodged in a hermitage.
Then he decided that her diet

- 304 Would consist of plants, bread, and clear water,
So that she may forget her past comfort.
Finally, he told her her penance:
She was not to lift up her eyes

- 308 But was to look always at the ground.
She readily accepted the penance
And did as well as she could,

- Little by little, striving to succeed.
 312 Because she feared death,
 Her master would visit her often
 And talk her out of her fears.
 And she was trying to behave
 316 In accordance to his dictates.
 "What am I doing here? Nothing!
 I do not see that it brings me any good.
 I will get out and go away.
 320 What I am saying? I will do no such thing.
 I realize that Lent is coming,
 During which a sinner must refrain
 From doing evil, in God's name.
 324 Certainly, I will not leave
 Because it would not be proper.
 But after Easter, with the beginning of the new liturgical year,
 I will go away without delay,
 328 For it does not please me to stay here.
 But I will wait until that time,
 Persevering in my service to God."
 Such was the debate she went through,
 332 At the end of which she decided to control herself
 And to remain in her hermitage until Easter.
 Then, with the beginning of the new liturgical year,
 Thais prepared herself to go,
 336 Not caring to stay in her cell any longer.
 She stood up, looked at herself,
 Stared at her hands,
 And saw that her flesh had turned dark and colorless,
 340 And was now wrinkled, creased, and dirty.
 She realized that her appearance had changed,
 On account of such harsh living conditions.
 And she could not help but say to herself:
 344 "If I begin to care for my body
 And to love it again,
 God will never be pleased.
 If I go back to my old ways,
 348 God will give me such a fight,
 Such a war, and such a struggle,
 That my flesh will feel dismembered.
 Alas! Bewitching and mad flesh!
 352 Alas! Deceiving and sinful flesh,
 Which is trying to tempt me
 And to dominate me!
 Condemned flesh, ugly flesh,
 356 I will never let you
 Degrade me, internally or externally.

- Go back to the filth that comes from the body!
 I will chastise you every day,
 360 And will control you,
 You who want my damnation
 And who want to inspire me anew
 Toward vanity, which I forsook
 364 As does the animal when it molts.
 I have done penance
 For at least two winters and one summer.
 I will now do so well
 368 That I will abandon evil and choose God.
 [. . .]
 375 "The head is the beginning
 And the tail is the end:
 This saying means that he accomplishes nothing,
 378 Who starts well but does not complete his work.
 But he who wants to persevere in doing well
 Must pay attention to both the head and the tail.
 The head does not function well
 382 Without reaching the tail.
 I want to live and to die
 In pursuit of my penance.
 This wish will henceforth be my daily concern,
 386 As my master has taught me.
 He was right, and I will persevere
 In the way that he showed me, for my own good."
 Thus, Thais controlled herself.
 390 And God filled her with the desire to do good,
 And remained with her.
 She lived her penance
 For at least five years, as a good woman,
 394 Chastising her body for the sake of her soul,
 And for the service of Jesus Christ,
 As the wise man had advised her.
 God was pleased with her work
 398 And saw that it was good and pure.
 It happened that, one night,
 Her master, as he was returning from Matins,
 Had, by the grace of God,
 402 His spirit taken out of his body
 And led to Hell.
 There he saw the torments and the condemned souls
 Struggling in great fires,
 406 Crying and lamenting,
 And saying: "Alas! How painful
 This sorrowful sojourn,
 Where we endure so many tortures,

- 410 And which we will never leave!
 We are paying too dear a price
 For the comfort we enjoyed on earth,
 And for the evil deeds we did.
- 414 Now we know the truth
 About Hell, and the truth conforms
 To what we were taught while we were alive.
 All the bad people who are still in this world,
- 418 And who commit their wrong deeds,
 Do not know that they are destined
 To this pain and to this shame.”

(The hermit's spirit is now led to Heaven, whose richness is indescribable.)

- 469 A bed stood in the middle of Heaven.
 I can neither describe nor explain it to you,
 For I lack the knowledge.
- 472 It was a spiritual bed,
 Sanctified and arranged
 As is proper in Paradise.
 This is all I can say.
- 476 And the guide who was leading the hermit's spirit
 And had shown him the good and the evil,
 Now told him: “Friend, God had seen
 Thais whom you have converted,
- 480 And how she behaved so well.
 It now pleases God to place her
 In this chamber and on this bed,
 For He has chosen her.
- 484 Within three days, she will give to God
 Her spirit, and will come here.
 You will now depart from this place.
 You will then sing a Mass,
- 488 And serve Thais as a good and holy person,
 For she is illuminated in the Book of Life.”

(The hermit's spirit returns to his body. Visiting Thais, he announces God's plan to her.)

- 521 She readied herself for death,
 Looking toward Heaven,
 As she was asked.
- 524 Life left her body.
 Angels came to fetch her soul,
 Receiving her with great joy
 And bringing her to her destination.
- 528 Three men, witnessing this event,
 Gave thanks to God

- And buried her body devoutly.
 Laying it in its tomb,
 532 They carried it devoutly
 And put it in the earth.
 He who gives himself to pleasure
 And loses his strength doing evil deeds,
 536 Cannot forsake his sin in the end,
 And is unable to repent.
 [. . .]
 548 One must therefore begin to do good,
 So as to earn
 A good end. For he who strives
 To lead the beginning to its completion
 552 Resembles this good woman,
 Who forced herself to do well,
 And chastised her flesh in such a way
 That in the end she came to God.
 556 Insofar as she was first a glutton,
 She is for us a good example.
 And he is mad, he who does not pay attention
 And does not learn from this lesson.
 560 You do not know what events
 Can provoke your death.
 From the time it is born,
 The soul progresses each day
 564 Toward Hell or Paradise.
 I hereby give you this advice:
 Fear the threats of God,
 And love His commandments.
 568 He who will do otherwise
 Will go to his damnation.
 God, who knows everything and who does not lie,
 Shows this to be the truth.
 572 He is mad, who is too sure of himself
 And who does not devote himself to God.

Version A

“Une dame fud ja ki ot a nun Thaisis”

Composed of 168 alexandrine rhyming lines, this poem is preserved in two manuscripts.¹⁸⁸

Thais A was for a long time attributed to “Henri” of Arci, but Perman, its editor,¹⁸⁹ and Legge¹⁹⁰ note that the poem was dedicated to “Henri” (ll. 147–48), not written by him. According to Meyer,¹⁹¹ “Henri” of Arci was an Anglo-Norman Templar, perhaps of French origin, who lived around 1250. Both Legge and Russell¹⁹² disagree with Meyer and identify “Henri” as one “Henricus” of Arci, an important member of the Bruer Templars who was cited as a witness in the year 1161. However, most scholars, among them Meyer, Kastner,¹⁹³ and O’Connor,¹⁹⁴ cite the linguistic characteristics of the poem as evidence that it was composed in the mid-thirteenth century, rather than in the twelfth.

Noting the humane dimension of the story as narrated by this anonymous author, Legge suggests that he was influenced by the preaching of the Mendicant Orders.¹⁹⁵ According to Payen, *Thais A* extols the value of asceticism, more openly so than *Thais B* or *Thais C*.¹⁹⁶ The legend of Thais did not enjoy the same popularity in the Middle Ages as that of Mary the Egyptian because of the more “intellectual” and therefore less moving quality of the heroine’s conversion, particularly as it is narrated by the author of *Thais A*.¹⁹⁷

Summary

Once upon a time, there was a lady called Thais who was esteemed by many men, and because of whom many went to Hell. Many of her suitors impoverished themselves in order to have her. Many quarreled for her at her front door. (ll. 1–10)

A certain abbot, Paphnutius, decided to dress as a layman and to visit her. Taking his money, Thais let him in. He saw her beautiful bed and, as she invited him there, requested a more private room. Thais agreed, but said that, however hidden, they would still be under God’s eyes. Comforted to realize that she knew God, Paphnutius made her see the extent of her sins and of her responsibilities. (ll. 11–46)

Thais now weeps out of remorse and asks Paphnutius to let her think for three days. She then ostentatiously burns her magnificent clothing. Paphnutius takes her to a convent and encloses her tightly in a cell. Water and bread are provided to her through a window. As Paphnutius is leaving, Thais asks him to teach her how to pray. He answers: “Do not raise your hands, do not name God, for you are still impure. But face the Orient and ask the Lord to have mercy on you.” (ll. 47–84)

Paphnutius leaves her there for three years. He then visits Saint Anthony in order to learn whether Thais has by now been forgiven. One of Anthony’s monks, Paul, goes to Heaven in a vision, sees a bed guarded by three beautiful virgins, and hears a voice praising Thais. Paphnutius now returns to Thais’ cell and lets her know of the vision. But Thais expresses her desire not to leave her cell. Paphnutius absolves her of her sins. Fourteen days later, she dies. (ll. 85–136)

You can see how this harlot was saved through confession. We too, whether lay or brothers, have sinned and can hope to be saved if we repent. Henri of Arci, brother in “Temple Salemun,” I composed this work for you and for your brothers, translating the most interesting episodes of Thais’ story. If you so wish, I will now translate that of the Antichrist, then that of Saint Paul. Listen attentively to my sermon, and you will become better. (ll. 137–68)

Version B

“Cui Deus donet droit sens, certes mut puet haïr”

This version of the Thais legend comprises 1,279 alexandrine lines grouped in stanzas of four rhyming lines. The poem is part of a didactic work known as the *Poème Moral*.¹⁹⁸ Eleven manuscripts contain the *Poème Moral*, in part or in whole.¹⁹⁹

The dialect of the *Poème Moral* is from northern France, with “an admixture of Walloon.”²⁰⁰ Bayot thinks that the anonymous author wrote his work in the district of the abbey of Lobbes, near Liège, around the year 1200.²⁰¹ Kuehne mentions the tripartite structure of the work—a customary scholastic device after the end of the twelfth century—as additional proof that the *Poème Moral* was written in the early thirteenth century.²⁰² One example of this device is the three sections successively exposing the vanity of earthly life, the folly of greed (which is illustrated in the *Life of Moses the Egyptian*), and the dangers of physical beauty (denounced in the *Life of Thais*).

The popularity of *Thais B* is attested by the fact that eight manuscripts contain only this part of the entire *Poème Moral*. Bayot believes that the author, who often addresses his lay audience directly (for instance, at lines 2309–10), was himself a lay cleric.²⁰³ Comparing *Thais B* to its Latin source,²⁰⁴ Rosenthal notes the French author’s ability to enliven the dialogues, as well as the practical aspect of his didactic interpolations.²⁰⁵ Wietzorek studies his treatment of Thais’ physical beauty as a warning of the dangers threatening women.²⁰⁶

Summary

Ladies, listen to my story, which concerns a woman whose beauty caused her to become proud and vain. Born in Egypt, this woman, Thais, conquered everyone

through her amazing beauty. Beauty leads women into temptation, just as avarice does men. But wise men can show women how to resist. This is what I would like to do now, as best as I can. (ll. 425–544)

Thais was leading a very evil life. A holy man, Paphnutius, decided to save her. Knowing the value of deeds over words, he dresses as a layman, comes to her, and asks her to take him into a private room. Thais agrees, while noting that God can see everything. Paphnutius proceeds to describe God's beauty and Satan's ugliness, in a sermon stressing the infinite compassion of God for all repentant sinners. Moved by his sermon, Thais asks him to show her how to avoid Hell. Paphnutius' answer insists on the importance of confession and penance. (ll. 545–1108)

Convinced by Paphnutius' arguments, Thais declares herself ready to follow his advice. She burns her possessions publicly, an apparently unwise action, for she could have given her goods to the poor; but God works His mysterious way. Once at the monastery, she is enclosed in a cell, where she is to live on bread and water. She remains there for three years. Not knowing whether she is now truly immune against temptation, Paphnutius goes to Saint Anthony to ask his advice. Paul, one of Anthony's disciples, has a vision of Thais' future glory in Heaven, and of the royal seat awaiting her. Paphnutius goes back to Thais and tells her that she is forgiven. But she refuses to leave her cell, despite Paphnutius' repeated assurances that she is saved. Fifteen days later, she dies. (ll. 1109–1680)

Angels take her soul to Heaven. She is seated on the throne and declared God's friend and spouse. Let us pray to her that she pray to God so that we may amend our sins and enjoy bliss in our turn. And you, to whom this Life is addressed, may God help you be cleansed of your sins. (ll. 1681–1704)

Notes

1. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fonds français 1553, from folio 400 verso to folio 406 [ff. 400v–06] (late thirteenth century).
2. A. J. Denomy (1938), 38–39.
3. Eleven Latin texts were written in Agnes' honor between the fourth and the twelfth centuries (*BHL*, 1: 156 ff.). See A. Dufourcq (1900), 214–47.
4. As mentioned by the author of *Agnes A*, ll. 804–08 (not included in our translated excerpts).
5. L. Réau (1958), 33–38.
6. Passages that are repetitive in the original text have been abridged.
7. Episodes that do not directly concern the portrayal of female perfection have been summarized.
8. Carpentras, Bibliothèque municipale 106, ff. 127–38 (early fourteenth century).
9. A. J. Denomy (1938), 189.
10. Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale 10295–304, ff. 59–63 (early fifteenth century).
11. Her life was subsequently recalled in epigrams, hymns, odes, prayers, songs, and dramas (see H. F. Williams, 1977, 96) and retold in two sixteenth-century French renditions (ed. H. F. Williams, 1975, 156–85).
12. L. Réau (1958), 169.
13. A. J. Denomy (1938), 154.
14. Her name figures in Sacramentaries and Missals used in that area. See V. Leroquais (1924–1927), 347–49.
15. A. J. Denomy (1936), 156.
16. In Rome, an eighth-century work of art associates her with the peacock, a symbol of immortality; and in twelfth-century Germany she is venerated along with Catherine of Alexandria and Dorothy as examples of the mystic Marriage. The tower remains her best known emblem: see L. Réau (1958), 170–77.
17. Paris, Collection Moreau 1715.
18. P. Meyer, “Notice” (1890), 1–90.
19. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, nouvelles acquisitions françaises 13521 (late thirteenth century): see P. F. Dembowski (1976), 172.
20. A fragment of which has been edited by E. C. Fawtier-Jones (1932), 206–17.
21. L. Réau (1958), 262–72.
22. Greek and Latin versions of the legend are discussed and compared by G. B. Bronzini (1960, 254–416), and listed by the Bollandists, *BHL*, 251–55.

23. K. Manger (1901).
24. L. Réau (1958), 268.
25. This passage (lines 550–55, which actually number six lines) reproduces the numbering of the poem as edited by H. A. Todd.
26. Which is preserved in a single manuscript, Paris, Arsenal 306, ff. 26–67 (mid-thirteenth century).
27. H. Breuer (1919), 203–87.
28. Tours, Bibl. mun. 945, folio 66 ff. (thirteenth century).
29. Tours, Bibl. mun. 948, ff. 122v–25v (late thirteenth century or early fourteenth century).
30. E. C. Fawtier-Jones (1932), 211, note 5.
31. Analyzed by P. Meyer (1890), 60.
32. These manuscripts are Berkeley, Bancroft Collection 106 (formerly Cheltenham, Philipps 3643), ff. 111–16v (late thirteenth century); Brussels, Bibl. roy. 10295–304, ff. 146v–58 (early fifteenth century); Carlisle, Chapter Lib., ff. 165–89v (fourteenth century); Chantilly, Condé (475) 1578, folio 220 ff. (fourteenth century); Paris, Arsenal 3516, ff. 121–25 (around 1268; the basis of Cahier's transcription); Paris, Bibl. nat. fr. 1807, folio 153 ff. (thirteenth century); and Turin, Bil. naz. M. VI. 7, folio 18 ff. (late fifteenth century).
33. And wrongly so: see K. Manger (1901), 13, note 4.
34. Carpentras, Bibl. mun. 106, ff. 66v–126v (early fourteenth century); and Paris, Bibl. nat. fr. 817, ff. 171–90v (1465).
35. A. Ducrot-Granderye (1932), 154–71.
36. Ed. V. F. Koenig (1955–1970), 2: 90 (ll. 2240–41).
37. A. C. Ott (1922), cxxxix.
38. According to Ott, the main source of Gautier's *Life of Saint Christina* is the *Acta Urbevenata* published by Pennazi in 1725 and listed as *Passio A* by the Bollandists (*BHL*, 1: 264). The *Passio A* appears in Ott's edition alongside the French poem.
39. P. Meyer, "Légendes" (1906), 344.
40. C. Fauchet (1610), 2: 553. But Fauchet's quote is in fact taken out of Gautier's poem, ll. 43–48.
41. Ed. M. A. Klenke (1951).
42. L. Réau (1958), 302–04.
43. This rhyme is known as "grammatical" rhyme—or *annominatio*—and is the characteristic feature of his *Miracles Notre Dame*: see N. F. Regalado (1970) and B. Cazelles (1978).
44. One of the gods venerated by the Saracens.
45. L. Karl (1909), 163–80.
46. A. Vauchez (1974), 163–73.
47. These documents include the list of miracles mentioned in the *BHL* (273–77); and accounts of her life as detailed in the *Libellus* (ed. Menckenius, 2: 2008 ff.), and in two thirteenth-century *Vitae* written by Cesarius of Heisterbach (ed. Boerner, 503–06) and by Thierry of Apolda (ed. Menckenius, 2: 1988 ff.), respectively.
48. H. Delehaye (1906), 102.

49. Ed. M. A. Klenke (1951), 59–74.
50. P. de Rosbo (1972), 88–89.
51. E. Faral and J. Bastin (1969), 2: 101–66.
52. These manuscripts are Paris, Bibl. nat. fr. 837, ff. 283v–94v (late thirteenth century); and Paris, Bibl. nat. fr. 1635, ff. 27v–38 (thirteenth century).
53. N. F. Regalado (1970), 264–65.
54. K. D. Uitti (1975), 394–408.
55. M. Zink (1990).
56. Brussels, Bibl. roy. 10295–304, ff. 158v–65v (early fifteenth century).
57. L. Karl, “Vie de sainte Elisabeth [. . .] par Nicolas Bozon” (1910), 302.
58. L. Karl, “Vie de sainte Elisabeth de Hongrie” (1910), 716–17.
59. L. Karl, “Vie de sainte Elisabeth de Hongrie” (1910), 708–33.
60. A. Jubinal (1839), 2: 360–411.
61. Paris, Bibl. nat. fr. 19531, ff. 112–32v (thirteenth century).
62. According to Ch. de Montalembert (1836, 1: 177), Robert followed the *Libellus* written by Thierry of Apolda and the *Vita* by Cesarius of Heisterbach. Robert and his model Cesarius similarly insist on the tenderness of the marital relationship between Elizabeth and her husband.
63. L. Karl, “Vie de sainte Elisabeth de Hongrie” (1910), 709–10. He notes that Robert copied 545 lines out of the 916 that constitute our second thirteenth-century French version. The episode narrating how God’s angel brings a divine garment to the saint (*Elizabeth B*, l. 137 ff.), for instance, is reproduced almost word for word in *Elizabeth C* (l. 1973 ff.).
64. These manuscripts are Brussels, Bibl. roy. 9229–30, ff. 61v–70v (late thirteenth century); Oxford, Bodl., Can. Misc. 74, ff. 87–108v (early thirteenth century); Paris, Arsenal 5204, ff. 87v–97v (fourteenth century); and The Hague, Bibl. roy., Th. 389, ff. 61v–70v (fourteenth century).
65. R. T. Hill (1919), 191–232.
66. R. T. Hill (1921), 44–49.
67. F. McCulloch (1977), 168–85.
68. *PL*, 73: 643–52.
69. R. T. Hill (1919), 163.
70. F. McCulloch (1977), 181–82.
71. Ch. Storey (1977), 385.
72. Ed. C. E. Stebbins (1971), 1–35.
73. H. Delehaye (1906), 228–32.
74. Welbeck, Portland I.C.I. (Campsey Collection), ff. 147–56 (thirteenth century).
75. L. Karl (1911), 210–29.
76. M. D. Legge (1950), 9–12.
77. Ed. A. T. Baker (1940–41), 50–52.
78. M. D. Legge (1950), 12.
79. The first one is a prose text dating from the sixth or seventh century (ed. by E. Hoepffner and P. Alfarc, 1926, 179–88); the second one is a verse text dating from the eleventh century (ed. Hoepffner and Alfarc, 189–97); and the third one is the eleventh-century *Liber Miraculorum Sanctae Fidis* (ed. by A. Bouillet, 1897).

80. M. D. Legge (1950), 9–12.

81. Who was to become the third most popular woman saint venerated in England: see F. Bond (1914), 117.

82. A. T. Baker (1924), 119–56.

83. Edited by E. Hoepffner and P. Alfarić (1926, 189–97), this Provençal poem has been analyzed by a number of scholars: among others, see A. Zaal (1962) and N. H. J. Van den Boogaard (1962), 195–202.

84. This conventional interpretation of the formula *a lei francesca* has been recently challenged by R. Lafont, for whom the word *francesca* does not refer to the language of northern France, but to the language and literary tradition of Aquitaine (1989, 17).

85. C. Segre (1970), 2: 1005–18.

86. L. Réau (1958), 514.

87. The poem comprises 1,300 lines, and not 2,000 as in H. von Feilitzen's edition (1883).

88. These manuscripts are Brussels, Bibl. roy. 10295–304, ff. 137–46v (early fifteenth century); Cheltenham, Phillipps 3668; Oxford, Bodl., Can. Misc. 74, ff. 62v–84v (early thirteenth century; the best and oldest manuscript according to Wilmotte, 1932, 215); Oxford, Bodl. Douce 381 (fragments; thirteenth century); Paris, Arsenal 3516, ff. 117v–21 (mid-thirteenth century); Paris, Bibl. nat. fr. 1807, folio 164v ff. (thirteenth century); and Paris, Bibl. nat. fr. 2094, folio 204 ff. (fourteenth century).

89. As S. T. R. O. d'Ardenne notes (1961, xxi), the poem has been labeled Anglo-Norman, and wrongly so; nor is it Walloon, according to M. Wilmotte (1932, 205). Its date is uncertain: E. Brunöhler (1912) specifies that *Juliana* was composed after 1150; P. Meyer (1906, 328–78), W. M. Bowen (1947, 82–86) and R. Bossuat (1951) classify it among the thirteenth-century vernacular Lives.

90. J.-C. Payen (1968), 489.

91. Edited by W. Strunk (1904), 33–49.

92. J. M. Garnett (1899), 282.

93. L. M. de Logindio (1966), 52–54.

94. H. E. Keller (1973), 3–22.

95. F. M. Mack (1934), xii.

96. Ed. M. A. Klenke (1951).

97. L. Réau (1958), 772–73.

98. Ch. Cahier (1875), 72.

99. D. G. Tammi (1958).

100. See the story of Marina the transvestite contained in this volume.

101. H. Delehaye (1906), 224.

102. B. Mombricitius (1479), 2: 103.

103. The *Mombricitius* Latin text is the source of a twelfth-century French poem authored by Wace (ed. E. A. Francis, 1927, 87–105); and, according to Francis (1932, ix–x), of five of the thirteenth-century renditions of the legend, namely: *Margaret D, E, F, G and H*. The second Latin source, known as *Caligula* in reference to one of the manuscripts in which the text can be found (London, British Museum, Cotton Caligula A. VIII), dates from the eleventh century, according to D. G.

Tammi (1958, 45). Published by E. A. Francis (1927, 87–105), the *Caligula* version inspired two of the eight thirteenth-century French poems: *Margaret B* and *C*. As to *Margaret A*, this rendition is based on a composite Latin version combining the *Mombritius* and the *Caligula* textual traditions.

104. G. H. Gerould (1924), 525–56.
105. A. Joly (1879), 184.
106. E. A. Francis (1927), 96.
107. L. Réau (1958), 877–82.
108. Ch. Cahier (1875), 42–77.
109. Ed. F. M. Mack (1934).
110. Ed. W. L. Holland (1863).
111. Analyzed by A. Joly (1879), 229–35.
112. Nicholas Bozon; ed. M. A. Klenke (1947).
113. Cited by D. G. Tammi (1958), 102–03.
114. P. Meyer, “Notice” (1890), 19.
115. P. Meyer (1906), 363.
116. L. de Herkenrode (1847), 2–23.
117. L. Carolus-Barré (1979), 256–75.
118. Paris, Bibl. nat. fr. 1555; ed. A. Joly (1879), 215–22.
119. E. A. Francis (1932), xi.
120. The Queen of Navarre in 1542 and the two Queens of France, Marie de Medicis in 1608 and Marie-Thérèse in 1661, are three illustrious examples of the way Margaret would be called upon to insure a safe delivery. See A. Joly (1879), 29.
121. London, Brit. Mus. Add. 38664, ff. 1–3 (thirteenth century).
122. Recently edited by K. Reichl (1975), 53–66.
123. F. Spencer (1890), 213–21.
124. York, Chapter Lib. 16. K. 13, ff. 119–28 (late thirteenth–early fourteenth century).
125. F. Spencer (1888), 488–95.
126. P. Meyer (1906), 20.
127. E. A. Francis (1927), 104.
128. W. Zingerle (1889), 414–16.
129. Cambridge, Trinity College Ec. VI. 11, ff. 1–8 (late thirteenth century).
130. F. Spencer (1889), 8 and 11.
131. P. Meyer (1890), 477–78.
132. Analyzed by E. A. Francis (1927), 104.
133. E. A. Francis (1932), ix.
134. D. G. Tammi (1958), 100.
135. D. G. Tammi (1958), 115–28.
136. Paris, Bibl. nat., Moreau 1715, 19–22.
137. See the description of *Catherine B*.
138. This manuscript is Paris, Bibl. nat., nouv. acq. fr. 13521 (late thirteenth century).
139. P. J. Jones (1933), 61.
140. E. A. Francis (1932), x–xi.
141. D. G. Tammi (1958), 112–14.

142. Paris, Bibl. nat. fr. 19525, ff. 142–45 (second half of the thirteenth century). The manuscript is analyzed by P. F. Dembowski (1976), 26.
143. E. A. Francis (1932), ix.
144. A. Joly (1879), 229–35.
145. P. Meyer (1911), 532–58.
146. D. Clanfield (1976), for a doctoral degree. I was unable to obtain a copy of Clanfield's dissertation.
147. London, Brit. Mus. Sloane 1611, ff. 147v–52 (thirteenth century).
148. Brussels, Bibl. Roy. 10295–304, ff. 128–137; and Vatican, Regina 1728, ff. 105–10v.
149. L. Clugnet (1903), 288–300. Clugnet's edition is based on the Vatican manuscript.
150. F. Nau (1901), 276–82.
151. See also the description of *Margaret*.
152. H. Delehaye (1906), 224, 228–31.
153. *PL*, 73: 692–96.
154. C. L. Rosenthal (1936), 42.
155. See P. F. Dembowski's analysis of the origin and texts of the legend (1976).
156. See G. H. Gerould (1905), 529–45.
157. *BHL*, 2: 801–02.
158. The anonymous *Mary I*; and *Mary II*, authored by Adgar. See P. A. Johnson and B. Cazelles (1979), 277–83.
159. Ed. P. F. Dembowski (1976), 160–68.
160. Ed. M. Schiavonne de Cruz-Saenz (1979).
161. M. Wietzorek (1939).
162. L. Réau (1958), 884–88.
163. See also above, *Elizabeth A*.
164. Paris, Bibl. nat. fr. 837, ff. 316v–23 (third part of the thirteenth century); and Paris, Bibl. nat. 1635, ff. 71–80 (thirteenth century).
165. Ed. E. Faral and J. Bastin (1969), 210.
166. A. T. Baker (1916–17), 281.
167. B. A. Bujila (1949).
168. Which P. F. Dembowski calls *O* (1976), 23; see also S. Nash (1971), 695–705.
169. J.-C. Payen (1965), 48–76 and (1968), 503.
170. K. D. Uitti (1975), 394–408.
171. See B. Cazelles (1979), J. Chocheyras (1981), F. McCulloch (1982), and E. Swanberg (1982).
172. London, Brit. Mus., Old Royal 20 B XIV, ff. 119–21v (early fourteenth century).
173. H. Kjellman (1922), 47–49.
174. P. F. Dembowski (1976), 160–68.
175. Cambridge, St John's College B9, ff. 76–82 (early fourteenth century).
176. K. Grass (1908), 37–62.
177. P. Meyer (1886), 320.

178. R. Levy (1957), 13–17.
179. F. Nau (1903), 51–114.
180. Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 614–16.
181. P. Battifol (1903), 207–17.
182. *PL*, 73: 661–64.
183. See C. L. Rosenthal (1936), 36–37.
184. See E. Schwan (1884), 233–63.
185. F. Nau (1903), 51–114.
186. J.-C. Payen (1970), 1: 190–91.
187. Musée Condé 275, ff. 131v–35v.
188. London, Brit. Mus. Harley 2253, ff. 21v–22 (thirteenth century); and Paris, Bibl. nat. fr. 24862, ff. 97v–98 (mid-thirteenth century).
189. R. C. D. Perman (1961), 280–86.
190. M. D. Legge (1963), 191.
191. P. Meyer (1896), 140.
192. J. C. Russell (1931), 258.
193. L. E. Kastner (1905), 385–95.
194. B. A. O'Connor (1949), xxvi.
195. M. D. Legge (1950), 56.
196. J.-C. Payen (1970), I: 190.
197. J.-C. Payen (1968), 503.
198. Ed. A. Bayot (1929), ll. 425–1704.
199. These manuscripts are Brussels, Bibl. roy. 9229–30, ff. 53–61 (late thirteenth century); Louvain, Bibl. univ. G 53, ff. 188–203 (this fourteenth-century manuscript was burnt in 1940); Oxford, Bodl. Can. misc. 74, ff. 19–62 (thirteenth century); Paris, Bibl. nat. fr. 2162, ff. 107–15 (thirteenth century; *Thais* is incomplete); Paris, Bibl. nat. fr. 23112, ff. 96v–104v (thirteenth century); Paris, Bibl. nat. fr. 24429, ff. 140v–55v (fourteenth century); Paris, Bibl. nat. fr. 25545, folio 95 (fourteenth century; *Thais* is incomplete); Paris, Arsenal 3516, ff. 109v–13v (in 1267); Paris, Arsenal 5204, ff. 78–87 (fourteenth century); Paris, Bibl. nat. 2039, ff. 35–36 (fourteenth century; excerpts from *Thais*); and The Hague, Bibl. roy. 389, ff. 53–61v (fourteenth century).
200. O. R. Kuehne (1922), 81.
201. A. Bayot (1929), cxxviii.
202. O. R. Kuehne (1922), 80–84.
203. A. Bayot (1929), lxxviii.
204. *Vitae Patrum*, *PL*, 73: 661–64.
205. C. L. Rosenthal (1936), 45.
206. M. Wietzorek (1939), 23.

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Appendices

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The Ninth-Century Sequence of Saint Eulalia

Composed around the year 881 by the monks of the Saint-Amand abbey, near Valenciennes, this short liturgical poem, or “sequence,” is preserved in a ninth-century manuscript.¹ The language of this earliest surviving example of French poetry combines Latin with archaic and regional vernacular traits. It is mainly because of its linguistic features that *Eulalia* has attracted the attention of the critics.

The Sequence celebrates the martyrdom of a third-century Spanish saint, the twelve-year-old Eulalia, who supposedly died under Maximian’s persecution. Veneration for the young saint spread from Spain to Africa, Gaul, Italy, and England. The Saint-Amand monks composed two texts in her honor, both preserved in the same Valenciennes manuscript: one in Latin, and the less rhetorical, more dramatic French poem.²

- Eulalia was a good maiden.
She had a beautiful body, a soul even more beautiful.
God’s enemies wanted to conquer her,
4 Wanted to have her serve the Devil.
But she does not listen to the evil men who urge her
To renounce God, Who lives on high in Heaven.
Neither gold, silver, or rich clothing,
8 Nor royal threats or entreaties,
Ever succeeded in forcing
The maiden not to love the service of God.
This is why she was brought before Maximian,
12 Who was, in those days, the king of the pagans.
He exhorts her—but she takes no heed—
To abandon the name of “Christian.”
She gathers her strength:
16 She would rather endure tortures
Than lose her virginity.
This is why she died very honorably.
They threw her into the fire, so that she would burn alive.
20 But there was no sin in her, and she did not burn.

- The pagan king would not believe this miracle:
 He condemned her to be beheaded with a sword.
 The maiden did not contest this condemnation:
- 24 She wants to flee the world, and requests this from Christ.
 In the shape of a dove, she rose to heaven.
 Let us all pray to her that she may pray for us,
 So that Christ may have mercy on us
- 28 After death, and may let us join Him
 Through His compassion.

Notes

1. Valenciennes, Bibl. mun. 150, fol. 141v.
2. Ed. A. Henry (1953), 2-3.

Holy Heroines of Hagiographic Romance: Summary of Information

The following is a summary of information on the thirteen heroines celebrated in thirteenth-century hagiographic romance. For each saint, this summary mentions: first, her origins in terms of place and date and the pertaining Latin textual tradition as listed in the *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina* (BHL); second, the Latin source(s) that might have directly or indirectly inspired the vernacular Life translated in this Anthology; third, the approximate date when the French poem was composed; and last, the dialectal characteristics of the poem and the name of its author whenever possible.

The thirteen heroines commemorated in the surviving poems composed during the thirteenth century embody three different types of saintly behavior. Seven were chosen among the virgin martyrs of early Christianity; four led the eremitic mode of life favored by monks in Egypt and Asia Minor during the fourth and fifth centuries; and only two were married women. These numbers reveal both a preference for venerating temporally distant, rather than contemporary, holy women, and a tendency to exalt chastity as a mode most conducive to female perfection.

A. Martyrs

AGNES

Rome; circa 304. *BHL*, 1: 27–28

Gesta Sanctae Agnes, attributed to Ambrosius (sixth century)

Agnes A: before 1250

Cleric (near Laon, Northern France)

BARBARA

Nicomedia (Bithynia, Asia Minor); no date. *BHL*, 1: 142–46

Golden Legend, by Jacobus de Voragine (thirteenth century)

Late thirteenth century (district of Hainault)

CATHERINE OF ALEXANDRIA

Alexandria (Egypt); no date. *BHL*, 1: 251–55

Vulgata (mid-eleventh century)

Catherine B: thirteenth century

“Gui”

CHRISTINA

Bolsena (Latium); no date. *BHL*, 1: 264–66

Acta Urbevenata

Between 1214–1218

Gautier de Coinci (Benedictine monk at Vic-sur-Aisne, near Soissons)

FAITH

Agen (France); circa 303. *BHL*, 1: 441–44

Passions in sixth- and seventh-century prose, and in eleventh-century verse

1205–1210

Simon of Walsingham (Benedictine monk at Bury St. Edmunds)

JULIANA

Nicomedia; third century. *BHL*, 1: 670–71

Vita composed around 568

Early thirteenth century

MARGARET OF ANTIOCH

Antioch; no date. *BHL*, 2: 787–88

Tenth-century *Vita* (ed. Mombricitus)

Margaret G: thirteenth century

Norman and Picard linguistic traits

B. Hermits

EUPHROSINA

Alexandria; fifth century (?). *BHL*, 1: 408–09

Vitae Patrum

Early thirteenth century

Benedictine monk (northern France)

MARINA

Bithynia; early fifth century. *BHL*, 2: 813

Vitae Patrum

End of the thirteenth century

MARY THE EGYPTIAN

Alexandria; fifth century. *BHL*, 2: 801–02

Seventh-century Greek version attributed to Sophronios; many Latin adaptations

Mary B: between 1248–1277

Rutebeuf (Parisian lay cleric)

THAIS

Egypt; mid-fourth century. *BHL*, 2: 1160–61

Vitae Patrum

Thais C: after 1250

Probably from Champagne

C. Married Women

PAULA

Born in Rome around 345; married Toxotius who left her a widow at 33 years of age, with five children; with her daughter Eustochium, followed St. Jerome to the Holy Land in 385; died in Bethlehem in 404. *BHL*, 2: 950.

Fifth-century account by St. Jerome (*PL*, 22: 878–906)

Around 1290

ELIZABETH OF HUNGARY

Daughter of King Andrew II of Hungary, she was born in 1207 at Bratislava; was married to the landgrave of Thuringia, Ludwig IV, in 1221; died at Marburg in 1231 and was canonized in 1235. *BHL*, 1: 373–77

Thirteenth-century accounts by Cesarius of Heisterbach and Thierry of Apoldia; trial of canonization

Elizabeth A: between 1258–1270

Rutebeuf (Parisian, lay cleric)

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Selected Bibliography

The following abbreviations are used:

AASS = *Acta Sanctorum*

BHL = *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina*

PL = *Patrologia Latina*

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